

Ancient Greek and Roman Methods of Inquiry into the (Human) Good

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Summary

In this dissertation, I suggest a new explanation for disagreement about the human good (I.e. what makes a human life good) in ancient philosophy: namely, that differing understandings of argumentation contexts and goals shaped selection of argument schemes, which in turn influenced which theories of the good seemed plausible. The texts I primarily deal with are connections between Plato's *Gorgias* and the *Philebus*, Aristotle's *Topics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Seneca's *EM* 82, 83, 87 and 120, Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus* and Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, and Sextus' *Outlines of Skepticism*.

Zusammenfassung

In dieser Dissertation schlage ich eine neue Erklärung dafür vor, warum es in der antiken Philosophie eine tiefe Meinungsverschiedenheit in Bezug auf das menschliche Gute gab. Die Erklärung lautet, dass verschiedene Autoren verschiedene Auffassungen über die Kontexte und die Ziele von Argumenten über das menschliche Gute vertraten. Daraus ergab sich, dass sie nicht dieselben Argumente als gültig anerkannten und daher verschiedene Theorien über das Gute als plausibel erachteten. Die Texte, mit denen sich in erster Reihe beschäftigt wird, sind: Platons *Gorgias* und *Philebos*; Aristoteles' *Topik* und *Nikomachische Ethik*, Senecas *Epistulae Morales* 82, 83, 87 und 120; Epikurs *Brief an Menoikeus*, Lukrez' *De Rerum Natura*, Sextus' *Grundzüge der pyrrhonischen Skepsis*.

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List of Abbreviations

<i>Ad. Men.</i>	Epicurus' <i>Epistula Ad Menoecus</i>
<i>APo</i>	Aristotle's <i>Analytica Posteriora</i>
<i>APr</i>	Aristotle's <i>Analytica Priora</i>
<i>De Fin</i>	Cicero's <i>De Finibus</i>
<i>DL</i>	Diogenes Laertius' <i>Lives of Eminent Philosophers</i>
<i>DRN</i>	Lucretius' <i>De Rerum Natura</i>
<i>EE</i>	Aristotle's <i>Ethica Eudemia</i>
<i>EM</i>	Seneca's <i>Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium</i>
<i>EN</i>	Aristotle's <i>Ethica Nicomachea</i>
<i>Euth</i>	Plato's <i>Euthydemus</i>
<i>KD</i>	Epicurus' <i>Kuriai Doxai</i>
<i>M</i>	Sextus Empiricus' <i>Adversus Mathematicos</i>
<i>Met</i>	Aristotle's <i>Metaphysica</i>
<i>PH</i>	Sextus Empiricus' <i>Pyrrhonian Hypotheses</i>
<i>Phys</i>	Aristotle's <i>Physics</i>
<i>SVF</i>	Hans von Arnim's <i>Stoicorum veterum fragmenta</i>
<i>US</i>	Hermann Usener's <i>Epicurea</i>
<i>VS</i>	Epicurus' <i>Vatican Sayings</i>

~Introduction~

G.E.L. Owen's *Tithenai ta Phainomena* heralded a shift from a focus on Aristotle's *Analytics* as providing a method for his work in natural, theoretical and practical philosophy, to a focus on Aristotle's dialectic, understood particularly through Aristotle's description of laying out the appearances at the beginning of *EN VII*. This idea was given further development in seminal works by Martha Nussbaum and Terence Irwin,¹ and the procedure that Aristotle outlines in *EN VII* has even been taken to capture the methods of ancient philosophy, or indeed philosophy, more generally. That Aristotle frequently applies dialectical methods and uses *endoxa* in his philosophical treatises is by now a very familiar assumption in Aristotle scholarship, although scholars will disagree about precisely what is meant by either of these claims.

This dialectical shift has allowed more sympathetic readings of ancient texts, and constitutes a large advance in our understanding of the early history of western philosophy. Nevertheless, the approach is beginning to show its age because of progress on a number of fronts. First, and most encouragingly, Aristotle's *Topics* has by now enjoyed considerably

¹ See e.g. Nussbaum's *The Fragility of Goodness*, and in "Therapeutic Arguments: Epicurus and Aristotle" and Irwin's *Aristotle's First Principles*. As another example, see Kraut's "How to Justify Ethical Propositions: Aristotle's Method".

more scholarly attention.² As a result, a more sophisticated understanding of Aristotelian dialectic has emerged. This has made clear the difficulty of explaining precisely what it is for a philosophical method to be dialectical, given that the *Topics* describes a social practice that seems rather unlike what we find outlined in *EN VII*. From a different direction, readers of Aristotle's philosophical works have found that while the method outlined in *EN VII* certainly captures the procedure in a number of passages, other passages do not take readily to an analysis along these lines, an observation that encouraged Dorothea Frede to compile such examples even in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in her excellent "The *Endoxon Mystique*". Scholars increasingly perceive the need for a deeper and more thorough study of the argumentation in ancient philosophical works; but the task is a very daunting one.

My purpose in this thesis is first and foremost to build on this work and provide scholars with a more sophisticated understanding of the argument theory in one particular, focused area of ancient philosophy: the study of what is good in human lives. In saying that I am focusing on the study of what is good in human lives, I do not mean to suggest that this may be separated neatly from questions of what is good in the universe, or indeed that human lives have for all ancient philosophers some distinctive good. Nevertheless, understanding what makes some lives more worth choosing, or better, than others was a central concern of ancient ethics. From here, I will refer to this as "the good" for the sake of brevity.

² Since Owen published *Tithenai ta Phainomena*, most of the work that contemporary scholars of the *Topics* depend on has been published, including notably: the collection *From Puzzles to Principles*, edited by May Sim, Robin Smith's translation and commentary of *Topics I and VIII*, Wagner and Rapp's German commentary and translation of the *Topics*, and the collection *The Development of Dialectic from Plato to Aristotle* by Jakob Fink, and indeed even Brunschwig's translation, text and commentary.

I have chosen this focus for several reasons. The first is that it is an important question in ancient philosophy, so there are a lot of ancient texts with a lot of arguments that may be studied, and results may be helpful to a large number of scholars. The second is that the content and arguments of ancient theories about the good have been studied extensively, which makes it easier to approach the texts. The third is that argumentation about the good is particularly interesting, as it has often been denied, for example by Hume, that the good is something about which argument is possible.

Even with this focus, the topic is rather large, and, as the approach I am taking here is new, what I say is largely in an exploratory spirit. The arguments I outline in this thesis tendentiously suggest that differences in understanding of argumentative context and goals of argument gave rise to different standards of evaluation of arguments in each of Plato, Aristotle, the earlier Stoics, Seneca, Epicurus, and Sextus, that this shaped argument scheme selection differently in each of these authors, and that this is an important, overlooked, factor in explaining disagreement about the good in ancient philosophy. The studies in this thesis also detail the different understandings of context and purpose, and discuss scheme selection: I hope these will be of considerable value to scholars approaching these texts, and will allow them to approach each author on terms closer to the author's own.

Dogmatism and Inquiry in Ancient Philosophy

This study also helps to bring a new perspective on a different debate. Some scholars have perceived a kind of dogmatism in ancient philosophy, an inability for philosophers from one school to engage with the arguments of philosophers from other schools. And some have

thought that this is because for ancient philosophers, philosophical inquiry was not about a serious and intellectually honest investigation into the truth.

The most prominent advocates of this response are Pierre Hadot and Martha Nussbaum.

Pierre Hadot writes:

The dogmas and methodological principles of each school are not open to discussion. In this period, to philosophize is to choose a school, convert to its way of life, and accept its dogmas. This is why the core of the fundamental dogmas and rules of life for Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism and Epicureanism remained unchanged throughout antiquity. [...] This does not mean that theoretical reflection and elaboration are absent from the philosophical life. However, this activity never extended to the dogmas themselves or the methodological principles.³

Theoretical reflection, in the philosophical life, did not extend to the dogmas of a school, or its methodological principles. The arguments we find, then, are not about theoretical reflection, so much as about adherence to the way of life offered by each school, consolidation of its dogmas, and intellectual training.

Martha Nussbaum is less universal in her construal of ancient argumentation as divorced from inquiry into the truth, but she certainly thinks this about some of the ancient schools. About the Epicureans, for example, she writes:

³ *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 60-61

The effect of the arguments on Nikidion's ability and motivation to engage in them is a complex matter. On the one hand, as she becomes more deeply immersed in the Epicurean system, Nikidion will become both more zealous about the system and more competent in going through its arguments. But it may well be that she will in some sense get worse at arguing generally. The Aristotelian pupil becomes a better Aristotelian by becoming better at taking charge of her own reasoning; the same, as we shall see, is true of the Stoic. The Epicurean pupil is not encouraged to bring objections of her own against the system, or to argue dialectically; and as she becomes more dependent on the text and doctrines of the master, she may be less adept at reasoning for herself.⁴

The Epicurean does not use argument to inquire into the truth, and thus gradually becomes worse at arguing. Unlike the Stoics and the Aristotelians, the Epicureans, on Nussbaum's reading, become less and less able to 'argue generally'.

⁴ *The Therapy of Desire*: 136

John Cooper, in criticising Hadot, takes a similar position to Nussbaum's, seeing ancient philosophers as competing over whose theory met a shared standard of philosophical reasoning. In the introduction to *Pursuits of Wisdom*, he writes:

Any specific views and orientations that might characterize an ancient philosopher (as a Platonist or Aristotelian, or Stoic or Epicurean or Pyrrhonian Skeptic) [...] result simply from coming to accept different ideas, all of them supported by philosophical reasoning in pursuit of the truth, that these philosophical schools might put forward about what, if one does use one's powers of reasoning fully and correctly, one must hold about values and actions.⁵

I will argue that Cooper is right that Hadot goes too far in general, and that Nussbaum goes too far in certain cases, in underestimating the role of reason in ancient philosophy. However, he goes too far in the other direction. The opinions that each ancient philosopher developed were the result of serious and intellectually honest philosophical reflection. What explains the rift between different ancient philosophical schools is not dogmatic adherence to particular methods or axioms, but rather different understandings of the contexts of argument in

⁵ *Pursuits of Wisdom*: 19

studying the good, understandings that were not themselves defended through philosophical reasoning.

Argument Contexts, Purposes, and Schemes

My approach in this thesis is heavily informed by the tradition of argumentation theory. Argumentation theory is often traced to Aristotle's *Topics*, but the seminal work of modern argumentation theory is Stephen Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument*. In *The Uses of Argument*, Toulmin argues forcefully against the idea that there is a universal standard of argument that can be understood by reflection on logic independently from the close study of how people actually argue. Pushing for a more empirically oriented understanding of argumentation, Toulmin vigorously points out that the standards of argument in different fields are radically different, with induction, for instance, being acceptable in many fields, but not in mathematics. Argument should be understood through reference to field specific institutional norms of argumentation, which should be studied through an empirical study of how people actually argue in particular fields, and the norms that members of that field recognize as valid.

There are two concepts here that I would like to disentangle, that relate closely to each other: the notion of a *field*, or, in more recent work, a *context*, and the notion of *institutional argument norms*, which I will capture through the idea of *acceptable argument schemes*. Let us start with the latter.

Argument schemes, sometimes called *loci*, *topoi* or institutional norms of argument, are semi-formal descriptions of moves available within an argumentative practice. Examples include appeals to authority, *ad populum*, and citing research studies. The norms of an argumentative practice may be described by listing the argument schemes that are and are not acceptable within that practice, and under which conditions a scheme may or may not be acceptable. The approach I am taking in this thesis is empirical, and accepts two kinds of evidence for scheme acceptability within a philosopher's practice: either, 1) the philosopher *actually uses* the scheme, or at least *accepts* another philosopher's use of the scheme, or 2), the scheme appears on a list of acceptable schemes, such as within Aristotle's *Topics*.

When we look at the list of schemes different ancient philosophers find acceptable when studying the good, we find that these vary wildly. Why might this be? The possibility I explore in this thesis leverages the argument theoretical that scheme acceptability depends on the *context* of the argument. In an important sense, ancient philosophers were operating within the same context: they were all trying to find the truth about the good, and they were all in the same field, namely, philosophy. But their understandings of this context varied, which explains the differences in choice of scheme.

That the context of an argument might influence evaluation of the argument is a core tenet of argumentation theory, though this is not to say that argument evaluation is *entirely contextual*. Siegel has stressed the need for context-independent criteria in avoiding self-contradiction paradoxes, for example, and Van Eemeren stresses the overarching norm that the purpose of argument is to resolve disagreements on the merits.⁶ Nevertheless, context

⁶ Siegel, "Argumentative Norms." Van Eemeren, "In Context".

influences which arguments are reasonable to accept. Goddu has rightly stressed that in determining the evaluation of arguments, several factors are particularly important: the purposes of argumentation, the risk of assuming something is true when it is false, and the risk of assuming that something is false when it is true.⁷ For instance, we typically think that it is worse to mistakenly believe that a person is guilty of a crime than to let them go free, and this shapes the standards of argumentation acceptable in a court of law.

In the debate I am studying the claims I am looking at will be claims like: A is good, A is not good, A is bad. In the ancient debate, these were not seen as idle claims that could be considered in abstract from practical concerns, but as claims that had a bearing on how one was actually to live one's life. Failing to recognise that A is good had consequences, and wrongly assuming that A is good had consequences. We will see that ancient philosophers disagreed on how serious these consequences were, with Aristotle seeing it as more serious to fail to recognize that A was good, and the Stoics seeing it as more serious to wrongly assume that A was good. These different assessments of relative risk played an important role in determining which argument schemes Aristotle saw as acceptable, and which argument schemes the Stoics saw as acceptable.

In studying the argument theory in the ancient debate on the good, I have found it necessary to extend the understanding of the context to include psychological factors. In modern argument theory, it is usual to separate *epistemic* and *rhetorical* dimensions of argumentation, and certainly the ancients would accept that a bad argument could be persuasive, and a good argument could fail to be so, at least for a particular audience. In ancient argumentation,

⁷ Goddu, "Context and Argument Evaluation."

however, this distinction is not nearly so clear cut. Ancient philosophers were keenly aware of the limits of human cognition, how our desires, ambitions, and social context introduce biases and distortions into our thought. Argumentative practices, at least about the good, were not only supposed to provide justification for theories of the good, but also, depending on the author, to help us correct these distortions. We will see this most strongly in Seneca, who believed that refutation entrenched cognitive distortions, and that a different approach from the previous Stoics was therefore required.

This relates to another important dimension in the context: the way argument interacts with other epistemic sources. In the debate we are studying, this comes down to the question of whether we have a reliable perception or intuition of the good, under what circumstances such perception or intuition may be reliable or unreliable, and if it is distorted, in what ways it is distorted. As we will see, argumentation is often being used to overcome limitations of such an epistemic capacity, either to increase precision, or to correct for distortions.

It is important, I think, to mention what I am saying and what I am not saying about this disagreement. The ancient philosophers never explicitly discuss these different understandings of context; we can recover evidence of these understandings from their works, but it seems not to have been an issue for debate. If they had discussed it, however, the point of disagreement would *not* have been about the relative merits of the different arguments: these are, on my understanding, *context-independent*. What is different is in the *value* given to the different merits of the arguments in question, and how one must strike a balance between competing risks and benefits in studying the good. I do not wish to make any strong

claims about whether this disagreement is in principle resolvable or irresolvable; in any case, it was left unresolved.

Selection of Texts

My principle for selecting texts in this study have been those that will yield the most fertile results for deepening our understanding of the argumentation theory underlying the ancient debate on the good. Further and deeper work on other texts will certainly be needed to understand these issues completely, and, as mentioned earlier, what I say here is highly exploratory in nature. With that in mind, I will explain why the texts chosen here are interesting from this perspective.

My two best sources are, entirely unsurprisingly, Aristotle's *Topics* III.1–4, and, rather surprisingly, Seneca's *EM* 87. These two texts are separated by centuries and by language, but are united by a shared project: that of systematically outlining argument schemes for studying the good. As far as I am aware, there are no other independent, important extant texts in antiquity that have this precise focus, and, if we hope to go beyond the limits of our current understanding of method in studying the good, these two texts are our richest resource.⁸ For understanding *EM* 87, it was important to look also at Seneca's critique of

⁸ However, once we have a new translation of Alexander's commentary on *Topics* III, this will be an essential text for understanding these issues.

Zeno's dialectic in *EM* 82 and 83, and at Seneca's account of the use of *analogia* in finding the good in *EM* 120. I illustrate interactions between these different ways of knowing about the good in *De Ira* and *De Clementia*, as in each of these cases, the results are fairly clean. In the case of Aristotle's *Topics*, I showed how these are applied extensively throughout the *EN*, and especially in *EN* X, as this provides a particularly clean illustration of how Aristotle uses these *topoi* in the ethics. Another candidate text would have been the *ergon* argument, but the analysis here would be far from straightforward, and would raise cut across far fiercer debates, so I have left such an analysis of the *ergon* argument as a future project.

In other cases, considerations of whether a deeper argument-theoretic analysis is straightforward have also been key. Ultimately, a study along these lines of the complete Platonic corpus would be ideal, but that far exceeds the reasonable scope of this project. The *Republic*, the *Euthydemus*, and the *Philebus* were all promising, but I chose the *Philebus* because its framing is most clearly about selection of what makes a life good, because there are a number of argument schemes that may be recovered for it, and analysing these in light of Plato's remarks about argumentation in the *Symposium* and the *Gorgias* yields a novel argument in an interesting interpretative debate on the text. What I say here should certainly not be expected to generalise to all of Plato's works, and stands as a preliminary result in need of future confirmation.

I included a study of Epicurus as I felt that there were interesting argument theoretical considerations here as well, but in Epicurus' case the evidence is extremely thin. I have made fairly extensive use of Lucretius in supplementing Epicurus, because Lucretius often includes very helpful remarks to situate the arguments that he is presenting. It is hard to tell whether this is how Lucretius made sense of these arguments, and why he was convinced, or whether this accurately reflects Epicurus' views; it was nevertheless possible, using these texts, to provide a coherent response. Future directions would certainly include more work on Philodemus, and may well show that understandings of argument context and acceptability of schemes fragmented within the Epicurean school as well. The work I present here provides a good starting point for pursuing this idea further.

I also chose to study Sextus' *PH*. The reason is that we can see Sextus exploiting precisely the differences in argument acceptability that I outline here, opposing argument schemes studied in earlier chapters, and because this technique of opposition itself is only justified against a certain understanding of the argumentative context, which Sextus describes quite explicitly. Again, the reason for preferring *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* over *Against the Mathematicians* is that I felt it gave a cleaner illustration of these concerns, which is a key factor in an exploratory study such as this one.

Summary of Key Findings

My recounting of this history starts (Chapter 1) with the arguments in Plato's *Philebus*. The striking feature of Socrates' strategies is that they avoid, so far as possible, making any reference to the interlocutors' preferences. Instead, Socrates develops a series of criteria for seeing whether something is good, and tests them on grounds far removed from the ethical. These features of his argument can be explained well by a comparison Socrates makes in the *Gorgias* and the *Symposium* between the powers of rhetoric and dialectic. Rhetoric, Socrates argues, cannot get around distortions introduced by people's characters far enough to show people that their orientation in life is wrong, or that they are of bad character. It is only dialectic that can do this, and it does it by arguing from premises whose relevance is not immediately clear. For Plato's Socrates in the *Philebus*, argument about the goodness of things is something that occurs within a dialectical debate, with a view to bringing about moral improvement in someone of bad character.

We turn to Aristotle (Chapters 2-3) and find the focus has changed considerably. Aristotle's understanding of the argumentative context involves three considerations (Chapter 2). First, the *dialectical aspect*: because the good is a first principle, arguments must not depend on any specialised knowledge. The skill of arguing about first principles is therefore a general skill that enables people to argue about anything, that is, dialectic. They should be accessible

to a person with 1. a good general knowledge; 2. mastery of the dialectical tools of disambiguating words, and seeing similarities and differences; and 3. familiarity with a collection of *topoi* as found in the *Topics*. In the context of the *EN*, these abilities are to be used not to refute positions, but in a search for the truth. Second, the arguments in the *EN* have a limited *protreptic* aspect. Aristotle claims that the point of studying the goodness of things is to become good, and that argument will only help people with minimally good habits. For this reason, Aristotle needn't argue nearly so indirectly as Socrates does in the *Philebus*. Third, the *ranking* aspect. Aristotle gives an unusually important role to the highest good in decision making. While Aristotle allows that there are multiple things that are good and desirable for their own sake, he thinks we should consider *only* the highest good in making decisions. To put it more concretely: Aristotle thinks the highest good is contemplation, and that pleasure, friendship and vision are good in themselves. However, when we are making decisions, we should choose as much pleasure, friendship and vision as will allow us to maximise contemplation.

These features play out in the argumentation we find in Aristotle (Chapter 3). The vast majority of argumentation in the *EN* instantiates a strategy from *Topics III*. I argue that we can use *Topics III* to detect general trends in Aristotle's argumentation. What we find is that Aristotle uses an overall strategy of *search and rank*: that is, he first identifies a list of things that he takes to be good, and then uses a series of tests to rank these goods with a view to

finding the highest. Little attention is paid to lower positions on the ranking, and no attempt is made to show that one of the candidates thought to be good is actually not good. Given these presuppositions, Aristotle's argument strategies are well selected. Yet the Socrates of the *Philebus* would have seen many of Aristotle's strategies as pointless, given that they depended on an audience who was already largely oriented towards the good.

Next we turn to Seneca. In Seneca's case, we need to identify two separate tasks. First, determining what is and isn't good (Chapter 4), and, second, arriving at the correct conception of virtue (Chapter 5), which is the only good the Stoics recognise. These two tasks involve slightly different assessments of argumentative risk and analyses of the relationship between argument and other epistemic sources.

In determining what is and isn't good, Seneca emphasises the dangers of believing that something is good when it isn't. These dangers include: wasting time, being distracted from good actions, and possibly even losing the consistency of one's life. For this reason, Seneca's arguments are focussed on *finding fakes*. Seneca, however, disagrees with Zeno of Citium about how fakes are to be found. Zeno of Citium developed arguments to be used in refuting opponents in dialectical contexts. Seneca thought that these arguments suffered from an epistemic flaw: they distracted people from thinking about, e.g, pleasure or death, and made them think about much more trivial things, e.g, the Sorites paradox, or trivial distinctions in

meanings of words. Seneca thought that direct and focussed contemplation of things was all that was really needed to determine whether they were good or bad. Seneca's arguments serve to guide this contemplation, to make sure each object is thoroughly contemplated. Accordingly, we should understand an argument strategy such as "what can be possessed by the worst possible people is not good" as an instruction for use in an intellectual exercise. When you think about money, for example, or pleasure, you must think about money and pleasure as possessed by the worst possible people; the thought is that in doing so, you will come to see that they are not actually good. Taken in this light, the argument strategies in *EM* 87 are quite good, and clearly distinguishable from the argument strategies of Zeno of Citium.

When it comes to finding the correct conception of virtue, we find the same focus on finding fakes, but it needs a new explanation. For it is not clear why Seneca should see identifying fake virtues as more important than ensuring one has identified all the virtues. Here, the question of epistemic aside from argument becomes important. While virtue is so rare that most people will never observe it, Seneca believes that we can extrapolate from people who have made progress towards virtue. He believes that we can extrapolate, using a process he calls *analogia*, to virtue. The key danger in this process is that there are vices that 'lie adjacent to virtue', which might lead us astray in our extrapolation. I understand this to mean that he thinks our capacity to recognise progress towards virtue is flawed, in that it doesn't distinguish virtue accurately enough from certain vices. This could be a problem, because

extrapolating from vices would lead to an incorrect conception of virtue. If we use arguments that allow us to identify these vices, we can better hope to make sure we start extrapolating from traits that actually are virtues, and thus the issue of finding fakes again takes prominence.

Plato, Aristotle and Seneca share a conception of the investigation into the goodness of things according to which it is an examination of objects to see what indications they have of being good. Epicurus differs from them in this respect.

Epicurus' understanding of the argumentative context is the most elusive, for the reasons of textual evidence I mention above, but I argue (Chapters 6, 7 & 8) that Epicurus wanted a methodology that would stay true to the principles of his epistemology. I argue that Epicurus wanted to base his study of the good as closely as he could on observation possible with the five senses and the feelings of pleasure and pain. To achieve this, Epicurus shifts the focus of a study of the good from the properties they might possess to the situations under which people desire them. Epicurus separates desires into two categories. Some arise inevitably, are not curable by knowledge, and, when their objects are present, are satisfied. Others can be avoided in the first place, are curable by knowledge, and are never satisfiable. The objects of the first kind of desire are good, and the objects of the second kind are not. These conditions on desires can all be observed through seeing who has what desires when.

In Chapter 7, I show that this framework is the best way to make sense of Epicurus' cradle argument. The cradle argument is a central argument of Epicurean ethics, used to establish the claim that pleasure is good, or, according to some reports, that it is the highest good. In Torquatus' presentation of the cradle argument in *De Fin*, the argument depends on the claim that the goodness of pleasure is sensed just as the sweetness of honey. This premise is missing from other reports of the cradle argument. The report in *De Fin* is generally taken to be the most authoritative, but I argue that it is unlikely to reflect Epicurus' original statement of the argument. For the claim that the goodness of pleasure is sensed looks like a misunderstanding of the Epicurean doctrine that pleasure is the measure of goodness, and that pleasure is a criterion of truth. The other reports of the cradle argument seem incomplete, and it is likely that the addition of this premise in Cicero's argument was a controversial attempt to make clear what Epicurus was thinking with the argument, most likely by later Epicureans. I argue that, given what else we know of how Epicurus argued about the goodness of things, it is more likely that he actually saw it as part of the overall scheme I outlined above, establishing that the desire for pleasure is inevitable.

I then turn (Chapter 8) to Epicurus' arguments about the unimportance of death. I argue that the right way to understand Epicurus on death is as claiming that a properly grounded understanding of death's nature will cure the fear of death, thus fitting the scheme I outlined

above: the fear of death is curable by knowledge, so death is not bad. This order of justification is rather surprising, but underlying it is the not implausible thought that things we only fear when we are ignorant of their true nature are not actually bad at all. Scholarship divides about how to understand Epicurus' discussion of death, and the point of division is in how to understand the phrase 'death is nothing to us'. If we understand this phrase as meaning 'death is not bad for us', then Epicurus argues that death is not bad for us on the grounds that it doesn't exist when we do, and from the similarity of the time before birth to the time after death. If we understand this phrase as meaning 'death does not relate to us', then Epicurus does not make such arguments. Instead, he argues that death does not relate to us on the grounds that it doesn't exist when we do, and the similarity of the time before birth to the time after death offers a model for correctly imagining what death will be like. I argue for this second understanding on the grounds that it fits the account Lucretius gives of how the Epicureans will cure the fear of death better than the first one does.

Finally (Chapter 9) I turn to Sextus Empiricus. Sextus, as a Pyrrhonist, advocated suspending belief. A major part of his motivation was the intractability of the problem of the criterion, that is, the problem of finding a shared standard by which to determine the truth or falsity of claims. I argue that, at least for the methodological disagreements outlined in this book, the claim that suspension of belief is the appropriate reaction to the problem of the criterion is difficult to defend. For the different methods correspond well with the different views of

argument acceptability that arise from the different argument contexts; given the motivations of an Aristotelian, for example, it makes sense to stick to an Aristotelian method. I argue that, given Sextus' understanding of the context of argument, suspension is the appropriate reaction. For Sextus, the point of philosophical investigation was to avoid the serious suffering caused by holding beliefs, and especially beliefs about what was and was not good.

Sextus Empiricus suggests a possibility readers may have in mind at this point: perhaps the most reasonable thing to do, in light of the methodological disagreement, is to suspend belief. I argue that, while suspension of belief makes sense given Sextus Empiricus' understanding of the argumentative context, the methodological disagreement is not a reason for other philosophers to abandon their position. I argue that Sextus Empiricus' claim that the Skeptic's goal is peace of mind should be understood not as a claim about the goal of a Skeptic's life, but as a goal of investigation: the point of Skeptical practice is to remove the discomfort caused by moral beliefs. With this goal in mind, suspension of belief is the most appropriate reaction to the problem of the criterion.

As will be clear from this outline, I have not tried to be exhaustive in my telling of this history. I have covered representatives of the most important philosophical movements in the tradition that I am studying, and I have selected these representatives on the basis we have texts from which we can reconstruct a vivid picture of the argumentative context, and the

impact this answer had on the argument strategies they selected. I have little doubt that there is more to be said about this history: there is certainly much more that could be said about Plato. Seneca's orthodoxy or otherwise as a Stoic on these matters could be better established, and a consideration of Philodemus' work would provide a richer picture of the Epicurean take on these matters.

Furthermore, as the point in writing this book was to bring out a general point about the structure of the ancient debate, the writings on each author are necessarily limited in scope. Readers may well find they prefer other readings of some of the texts I present, and have competing theories about how the authors I treat would understand the argumentative context, or why this might underwrite their choice of schemes. I have tried to offer in each case an overlooked, textually plausible reading, and philosophically compelling reading that will be of interest to specialists of the author in question. I have not tried to argue that these readings are definitive.

Nevertheless, the history I have presented reveals, for the first time, a largely tacit disagreement between ancient philosophers about the point of a philosophical investigation into the good and the nature of the challenge of such an investigation. The ramifications this disagreement had for the argument strategies employed by ancient philosophers. It is in large part because they disagreed about what problem a philosophical investigation into the

goodness of things ought most pressingly to solve, that ancient philosophers disagreed about which things were good, as this book will show.

~Plato~

Arguing Around Taste in the *Philebus*

At a key moment in the *Philebus*, Socrates argues that the life of pleasure without reason is no human life at all, but rather similar to that of a jellyfish (πλεύμωνος). It is therefore undesirable to humans, and so, ultimately, less desirable than the life of reason without pleasure. [21b–d] One way to read this argument is as a direct appeal to the readers’ desires: when the reader accurately comprehends what is involved in the life of pleasure, they will see that it is not a life they want at all.¹ Another way of reading this passage is as the clinical application of a criterion of the good: the good must be sought by all who know, and Protarchus’ plausible rejection of the life of pleasure is enough to show that it does not meet this criterion, even if the reader finds the idea of being a titillated jellyfish rather appealing.²

In this chapter, I want to show how considering Socrates’ choice of argument strategy elsewhere in the *Philebus*, as well as remarks Socrates makes about the superiority of his own argumentation over rhetoric in the *Gorgias* and the *Symposium* can help us to settle this

¹ Sylvain Delcominette gives a beautiful statement of this position in his *Philèbe*, see especially p. 170

² For an elegant statement of this reading, see Dorothea Frede’s *Philebos*. Her *Philebus* does not have the space to develop this reading in nearly as much detail.

dispute, in favour of the view that we find the dry application of a criterion.³ Through this investigation, we will also gain a deeper understanding of why Plato has Socrates argue in this way in the *Philebus*, and of what may be distinctive of Socrates' argumentation in the *Philebus*, as opposed to, for instance Aristotle's argumentation in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and, more significantly, the arguments offered by Socrates' interlocutors. We will see that underlying the tangle between Socrates and Philebus and Protarchus sits a disagreement about what argumentation is for.

Section One: Changing Characters

Our first step in approaching this issue will be to gain a better understanding of Socrates' understanding of his argumentative context in which he is operating.⁴ Several features of the context of Socrates' arguments are clear enough: they occur in dialogues in a relatively structured argumentative practice, known as dialectic, that was a cornerstone of philosophical practice in Athens. Moreover, they often seek to do more than simply persuade the interlocutor that Socrates is right, but have a further protreptic aim: Socrates wants to make his interlocutors better people. It is this protreptic aspect I want to focus on, because, if we take the arguments of the *Gorgias* and the *Symposium* seriously, Socrates understands this protreptic aspect as placing specific, and, to the modern reader,⁵ highly counterintuitive requirements on argumentation. Furthermore, in the *Gorgias* and the *Symposium*, Socrates

³ For work on Plato's argumentation in general, a good starting point is Fink (ed.) *The Development of Dialectic from Plato to Aristotle*. I am unaware of any work prior to this that shows how a Platonic dialogue may be approached systematically by considering the argument schema used in the dialogue in light of Plato's argument-theoretic remarks.

⁴ In making this move we are of course situating ourselves in the argumentation theoretical tradition exemplified in such works as Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument* and Walton's *What is Reasoning? What is an Argument?* According to this tradition, we cannot understand an argument independently of the argumentative context in which it occurs. See the introduction for some more details on this matter.

⁵ At any rate, to *this* modern reader.

will portray these requirements as *contrasting* with the rhetorical tradition in which he situates Philebus and Callicles.

The difference between the challenges could be outlined in the following way: for Callicles, the problem people face is that they have been tamed by social convention not to pursue what they really want; for Socrates, the problem is that imbalances in peoples' soul drive them away from the real good, and diminish their ability to reason clearly about it. For Callicles, what people need to see is that their broader culture is keeping them from pursuing what they really want, whereas for Socrates, they need to see that some powerful desires are keeping them from pursuing the desires that are most truly their own. Socrates thinks dialectic, and not rhetoric, is up to the task of showing people that the balance of power between their desires, must be altered.

I should like to make this point clearer, but there is enormous difficulty in expressing it.⁶ One should like to put Callicles' position in terms of *being true to who one really is*, or *what one really wants*, but Socrates is entirely unwilling to concede that ground. For Socrates, just as for Callicles, philosophical argument helps us to get in touch with who we most truly are. The difference rather seems to be in where they draw the limits of the self: for Callicles, a desire is external to who we are only if it is imposed by another person; for Socrates, desires that guide our actions may be at odds with who we are without being imposed by another person.⁷

⁶ My warm thanks to Christopher Roser and Jonathan Beere for patiently listening and persistently pushing back as I groped around for a pithy formulation.

⁷ I have used the rather clumsy formulations "desires that guide our actions" and "at odds with who we are" to navigate the strange territory in which Socrates will wish that to deny that these are *our desires* our *reflect who we are* in any very robust way.

I'd like to try to make this clearer by considering, to take an example that should be familiar, Nozick's experience-machine thought experiment.⁸ In this thought experiment, Nozick describes a machine that, by manipulating our brain, can give us any experience we like. He asks us to imagine that we have the choice of being plugged into this machine and being fed the experiences we would see as most valuable and wonderful to have for our whole lives, never being allowed to be unplugged, and we are supposed to determine whether we would like to be plugged in. If we would not like to be plugged in, then this is because we believe that there is more to life than having good experiences, and, in particular, we are not committed hedonists.

For neither Socrates nor Callicles will it be enough to see whether we would actually plug into the experience machine, as both will argue that it is quite possible that we would not, but that this would still not reflect who we are. For Callicles, the test will be whether what prevents us from plugging into the machine is our adherence to social norms, our reluctance to part from how *other people* want us to be, rather than from who *we want* to be. For Socrates, the distinction is not so cleanly drawn: the desires external to who we are may not have been imposed by other people, but may simply be the result of lack of proper development of the ability to recognise and assert our most fundamental selves. Socrates' claim is that rhetorical arguments cannot speak to this fundamental part of ourselves, but dialectical ones can. Callicles, on the other hand, sees rhetorical arguments as speaking to that part of ourselves that is independent from the voices of others, and dialectical arguments as reinforcing those voices.

⁸ Nozick, R. *Anarchy, State and Utopia*: 42–45.

We find this point made in the *Gorgias*, where Socrates argues that Callicles cannot both become a successful rhetor, and be better than the people, because the people will only accept arguments that match their own habits:

Socrates: [...] If it seems to you that some person teaches some such art which can make you greatly powerful in the city, although you are different from the citizens, either towards the better towards the worse, then it seems to me that you do not judge rightly, Callicles. For it is necessary not to be an actor, but to be similar to them by your own nature, if you are going to have any genuine effect on the affections of the people [*Demos*] of Athens and yes, by god, on those of that Demos son of Pyrilampes. Now if someone can make you completely like them [ie. the citizens], he will make you, just as you desire to be political, political and rhetorical. *For each person welcomes those who say words matching their own character, and are annoyed by those according with different characters.*⁹ (*Gorgias* 513a-c)

The *Gorgias* involves a discussion of which is better, the art of rhetoric or philosophy. Socrates' criticism of rhetoric has, from the beginning, been that it cannot teach people to be

⁹ εἰ δέ σοι οἶσι ὄντιν' ἄνθρωπων παραδώσειν τέχνην τινὰ τοιαύτην, ἥτις σε ποιήσει μέγα δύνασθαι ἐν τῇ πόλει τῇδε ἀνόμοιον ὄντα τῇ πολιτείᾳ εἶτ' ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιον εἶτ' ἐπὶ τὸ χεῖρον, ὥς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, οὐκ ὀρθῶς βουλευή, ὦ Καλλίκλεις· οὐ γὰρ μιμητὴν δεῖ εἶναι ἀλλ' αὐτοφυῶς ὅμοιον τοῦτοις, εἰ μέλλεις τι γνήσιον ἀπεργάζεσθαι εἰς φιλίαν τῷ Ἀθηναίων δήμῳ καὶ ναὶ μὰ Δία τῷ Πυριλάμπους γε πρός. ὅστις οὖν σε τοῦτοις ὁμοιότατον ἀπεργάσεται, οὗτός σε ποιήσει, ὥς ἐπιθυμεῖς πολιτικὸς εἶναι, πολιτικὸν καὶ ῥητορικόν· τῷ αὐτῶν γὰρ ἡθεὶ λεγομένων τῶν λόγων ἕκαστοι χαίρουσι, τῷ δὲ ἄλλοτρίῳ ἄχθονται.

good.¹⁰ If this is the criticism that Socrates makes of rhetoric in a contest between rhetoric and philosophy, then we can infer that he thought philosophy was capable of teaching people to become better. It is only in this passage, however, that we find the explanation of rhetoric's powerlessness: people reject rhetorical arguments that are not in keeping with their character.

¹¹ It is very difficult to reform someone using an argumentative style that will only persuade them if it tells them things that match their current character.

Socrates makes explicit, very shortly after this passage, the shortcoming of rhetoric that is explained by the fact that people are only persuaded by those arguments that are in keeping with their character:

Is there someone who used to be bad, unjust and intemperate, and stupid, who became fine and good because of Callicles, either a foreigner or a citizen, a slave or a free person?¹² (*Gorgias* 515a-b)

The answer to these rhetorical questions is of course no, just as it is for Pericles and the other famous rhetors at 515c-e. The point is that ability in rhetoric doesn't give one the capability to get someone to improve their character, as they will only be persuaded by arguments in line with their own.

¹⁰ This is his critical argument against Gorgias himself, at 460b-d

¹¹ Irwin, *Gorgias*: 232-3 and Dalfen, *Gorgias*: 444-5, correctly identify the objection against Callicles' claim that rhetoric will give him power: because he must adapt himself to be like the people he wants to convince, he cannot do what he wants. There is a further point here, as a refutation of Callicles: if Callicles thinks it is just for the better to rule over the worse, then, anyone succeeding at doing this with rhetoric will have lost their mandate, by becoming like the people. Irwin and Dalfen do not comment on the further point being made here, about the limits of rhetorical argument, which is the one that I wish to stress.

¹² ἔστιν ὅστις πρότερον πονηρὸς ὢν, ἀδίκος τε καὶ ἀκόλαστος καὶ ἄφρων, διὰ Καλλικλέα καλὸς τε καὶ ἀγαθὸς γέγονεν, ἢ ξένος ἢ ἀστός, ἢ δοῦλος ἢ ἐλεύθερος;

It's not only in the *Gorgias* that we find this criticism of rhetoric. We also find it, implicitly, in Alcibiades' encomium of Socrates in the *Symposium*:

When I listened to Pericles and the other good rhetors, I judged that they spoke well, but experienced nothing of this sort, nor was my soul shaken, nor did I become angry that I was in an abject state. But I was often moved in this way by this Marsyas, so that it seemed to me that I could not go on living as I was. (...) For he forced me to agree that I was lacking many things, and indeed that I was neglecting my duties affairs, while taking care of the Athenians'¹³ (*Symposium 215e-216a*)

The Marsyas in question here is Socrates, and here he is being compared with Pericles in much the same way as we saw in the passage in the *Gorgias*: Pericles spoke well, Alcibiades tells us, but never troubled his soul and made him see that he was in an abject state, and that he himself lacked many things. The power that Socrates has, that the rhetors do not, is in both passages the power of persuading someone that they are not a good person, to turn them towards the practice of virtue. The explanation, given in the passage in the *Gorgias*, is that people will simply reject arguments that do not match their character. And we get some idea of why rhetors can't manage this when we hear, later in Alcibiades' speech, what Socrates' arguments are like:

¹³ Περικλέους δὲ ἀκούων καὶ ἄλλων ἀγαθῶν ῥητόρων εὖ μὲν ἡγούμεν λέγειν, τοιοῦτον δ' οὐδὲν ἔπασχον, οὐδ' ἐτεθορύβητό μου ἡ ψυχὴ οὐδ' ἡγανάκτει ὥς ἀνδραποδωδῶς διακειμένου, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ τουτοῦ τοῦ Μαρσύου πολλάκις δὴ οὕτω διετέθην ὥστε μοι δόξαι μὴ βιωτὸν εἶναι ἔχοντι ὥς ἔχω. καὶ ταῦτα, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐκ ἐρεῖς ὥς οὐκ ἀληθῆ. Καὶ ἔτι γε νῦν σύνοιδ' ἐμαυτῷ ὅτι εἰ ἐθέλοιμι παρέχειν τὰ ὧτα, οὐκ ἂν καρτερήσαιμι ἀλλὰ ταῦτ' ἂν πάσχοιμι. ἀναγκάζει γάρ με ὁμολογεῖν ὅτι πολλοῦ ἐνδεὲς ὢν αὐτὸς ἔτι ἐμαυτοῦ μὲν ἀμελῶ, τὰ δ' Ἀθηναίων πράττω.

For when someone is used to hearing Socrates' arguments, they seem at first entirely ridiculous. For they are covered all over by such unusual nouns and verbs, like the skin of a wanton satyr. For he speaks of asses and donkeys and some coppersmiths and leather-cutters and tanners, and by these things he seems always to say the same things. (...) When however when someone looks inside them as they open up, and comes to be inside them, he will find first inside these words are the only ones that hold sense, and next that they have the most divine and greatest image of virtue¹⁴ (221e-222a)

There are two points about Socrates' arguments to take away from this. The first clarifies why rhetoricians cannot use the arguments: Socrates' arguments seem, at first, to be ridiculous, and it's only by going listening to them with an open mind and really coming inside them that we start to see their value.¹⁵

¹⁴ εἰ γὰρ ἐθέλοι τις τῶν Σωκράτους ἀκούειν λόγων, φανεῖεν ἂν πάνυ γελοῖοι τὸ πρῶτον· τοιαῦτα καὶ ὀνόματα καὶ ῥήματα ἔξωθεν περιαμπέχονται, σατύρου δὴ τινα ὑβριστοῦ δοράν. ὄνους γὰρ κανθηλίους λέγει καὶ χαλκέας τινὰς καὶ σκυτοτόμους καὶ βυρσοδέψας, καὶ αἰεὶ διὰ τῶν αὐτῶν τὰ αὐτὰ φαίνεται λέγειν, ὥστε ἄπειρος καὶ ἀνόητος ἄνθρωπος πᾶς ἂν τῶν λόγων καταγελάσειεν. διοιγομένους δὲ ἰδὼν ἂν τις καὶ ἐντὸς αὐτῶν γινόμενος πρῶτον μὲν νοῦν ἔχοντας ἔνδον μόνους εὕρήσει τῶν λόγων, ἔπειτα θειοτάτους καὶ πλεῖστα ἀγάλματ' ἀρετῆς ἐν αὐτοῖς ἔχοντας

¹⁵ That this text links with the *Gorgias* has been noted by Hunter, who mentions 491a, where Callicles accuses Socrates of talking about irrelevant things such as cobblers and cleaners. However, Hunter doesn't mention the parallel with Socrates' criticism of rhetoric. Joshua Willburn in "The Problem of Alcibiades": 14-24 connects the passage in the *Gorgias* with the passage in the *Symposium* that immediately follows, and draws out a similar point: the rhetor must, to please the crowd, gratify it, and so cannot lead it to self-improvement. Willburn, however, emphasises how Socrates draws on Alcibiades' and Callicles' spirited motivations to produce shame in them, whereas I will be interested in how Socrates positions his arguments in such a way as to draw on the interlocutors' character as little as possible.

The second point is that they start from seemingly irrelevant things, such as asses, donkeys, coppersmiths, leather-cutters and tanners. In the next two sections I will argue that it is precisely by moving to abstract considerations, that a person can judge without using their character, that Socrates minimises the role of the interlocutors' character in evaluating his arguments. Such starting points allow him to reveal to his interlocutors that the good is not what they are currently most strongly drawn towards.

It may sound unexciting and obvious that someone would want their arguments about the goodness of things to be able to show their intended audience that their desires were somehow misaligned. For, after all, the whole point of studying the good is to make sure one's life is properly oriented. It would be reasonable to worry that any arguments that could not show somebody that their desires are not correctly oriented would be of no use to them in orienting their lives.

But there is another possibility: our lives may be incorrectly oriented precisely because we have developed a habit of self-denial, and this habit might be so strong that we no longer really remember what we wanted in the first place. If this is true about us, then our need for arguments might not be for ones that show us that our desires are fundamentally wrong, but that help to bring us in touch with what it is that we actually really want.

In the *Gorgias*, Callicles argues that we are in such a state, because of our moral upbringing:

Callicles: For we ourselves shape the best and hardiest, taking them from a young age, like lions, and we enslave them, charming them and

bewitching them, saying that it is necessary to take the same and that this is the fine and the just.¹⁶ (483e4-a2)

The image of the strongest ones being subdued like lions is an image of them ceasing to go after what they want. Callicles points here to the claim that it is necessary to take the same, but this stands in for the norms governing socially acceptable behaviour. People want, Callicles thinks, to dominate others, and to live a life of pleasure; social convention prevents them from doing this, and restrains them at a very deep level indeed.

Callicles believes, furthermore, that these desires are natural inclinations. While they can grow bigger and smaller, any attempt to restrain them is an exercise of control analogous to the control a master exercises over a slave. Convincing someone to control their own desires is like appointing them to cooperate in their own subjugation, as though they were their own masters.¹⁷

Callicles' use of the terms 'master' and 'slave' and his discussions of slavery suggest the example of a desire where what Callicles says makes good sense: the desire for freedom. We might think that one reason, though certainly not the only one, that slavery is bad is that people naturally desire freedom. For them to lose this desire is a bad thing for them, which contributes to their oppression: if someone conditions a slave to no longer desire freedom,

¹⁶ πλάττοντες τοὺς βελτίστους καὶ ἐρρωμενεστάτους ἡμῶν αὐτῶν, ἐκ νέων λαμβάνοντες, ὥσπερ λέοντας, κατεπάδοντές τε καὶ γοητεύοντες καταδουλούμεθα λέγοντες ὡς τὸ ἴσον χρή ἔχειν καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὸ δίκαιον.

¹⁷ 492b-c. Irwin, *Gorgias*: 192, makes a similar point well "Callicles plausibly denies that if I manage to reduce my wants until all I want is e.g enough to eat for bare survival, I am happy when I satisfy that want; happiness or welfare requires a person to reach a certain level of demanding desires, to exercises a reasonable range of his capabilities." But Irwin doesn't go so far as exploring the connection between enslaving someone and reducing their desires.

that person has oppressed them in a profound way; if slaves teach each other and themselves no longer to desire freedom, then there is an important way in which they are contributing to their own oppression. It may be that their chances of escape are so hopeless that it's the best thing to do under the circumstances, but this doesn't take away from the fact that their loss of the desire for freedom is itself part of what is bad about their conditions as slaves. Callicles appears to think that all desires that occur without outside intervention are similar to the desire for freedom.

If Callicles is right, then the question is not one of finding the right alignment between desires, but finding out what desires you are inclined to have and nurturing them, if you can get away with doing so. While it might sometimes be prudent for some people to repress a desire, if you find yourself in a position of power, you no longer have any reason to do so, just as a slave who finds themselves in a position to comfortably escape no longer finds themselves with any reason to repress a desire for freedom, and would be well served by having such a desire in them awakened.¹⁸ In a situation of oppression, the most urgent task might not be to align one's desires with the good, but rather, to rediscover and foster the natural desires that one has.

But Socrates is not willing to so easily allow Callicles to stand as the champion of freedom. For Socrates will argue that we all have a deep and natural desire for whatever actually is good. If virtue is good, then everyone already desires it. Furthermore, this desire is in some sense our most fundamental.¹⁹ So for Socrates, like Callicles, the purpose of philosophical

¹⁸ 492a-b

¹⁹ For a good discussion of this issue, see e.g Kahn, *Gorgias: Plato's manifesto for philosophy*: 132-6.

argument about the good lies in enabling a person to pursue what they really want, and is an exercise in freedom.

The difference between them is a difference in understanding what we really want. For Callicles, the desires that spontaneously arise in us are what we really want, and efforts to curb and alter them count as denials of what we really want. This is what allows him to push the analogy with slavery: masters might try to control slaves by controlling what they do and do not desire. If we try to control in ourselves what we do and do not desire, we are standing in a similar relation to ourselves as a master to a slave.

Callicles is compelling because he describes a feature of conventional morality that really is problematic, and that we ought to be cautious about aggravating when doing moral philosophy. The feature is that conventional morality often demands of people that they suppress naturally developing desires that cannot completely or truly be suppressed, and which, left unfulfilled, lead to deep levels of dissatisfaction. This is clearly the case in communities in which it is considered morally abhorrent to be gay. I would say that an unnatural repression of the natural desire to speak the truth as we see it is demanded of in many cultures, including those with which I identify the most strongly, as is the desire to be emotionally expressive. I suspect that the same remains true for curiosity for new experiences, for a wide range of sexual desires, and for desires for emotional intimacy with those around us.

Socrates' claim is that, because our desires are difficult to fulfill, and may even be impossible to satisfy, they constrain what we can do, and they can limit our freedom. Curbing them is

therefore what will allow us to pursue what is really important to us.²⁰ Yet this involves the claim that there is a discrepancy between our desires, and what we really want. The more you see the suppression of natural desires, whose fulfillment is necessary for satisfaction, as a central function of moral discourse, the more suspicious you will be of arguments that purport to show you that the desires you have are stopping you from getting what you ‘really want’.

Socrates’ and Callicles’ answer to the central question, then, differ as follows. For Socrates, the purpose of philosophical reflection about the good is to reveal to you that, to get what you really want, you will need to curb some of your desires. For Callicles, the purpose is to help you liberate yourself from the stunting of your natural desires through moralising. Depending on whether you tend to see moralising as oppressive or uplifting, you will be more drawn to one answer or the other.

I will not, in this book, discuss an approach to studying what we should desire that focusses on bringing to the surface natural tendencies to desire things and encouraging their audience to get in touch with these natural tendencies. The focus in this chapter is bringing out the features of Socratic argument that allow it to show to someone that what the way to get what they really want is to curb their desires, rather than to become powerful enough to satisfy them. We will see that Socrates does this by subjecting desires to tests that can be applied with as little interference as possible from what the interlocutor currently wants, sees as good, or feels drawn towards. It is to a discussion of the strategies of Socrates that we now turn.

Section Two: Testing Candidates in the *Philebus*

²⁰ 493aff.

In most of the argument strategies employed by Socrates in the *Philebus*, it is relatively easy to see how the arguments constitute tests that can be applied with minimal interference from one's tendencies, inclinations, and desires. There are two features that recur again and again in the arguments: first, the arguments employ some kind of test condition for the goodness of things whose plausibility is unlikely to be affected by an interlocutor's actual desires; second, the arguments involve observations about human psychology, pleasure, or theology that are somewhat technical and abstract, with no obvious immediate practical implications about how to live one's life. For this reason, the outcome of the tests should not be influenced by the tendencies, inclinations, and desires of the people who apply them.

That's not to say that the tests will get the same outcome no matter who applies them, or that everyone, no matter who they are, will agree on what tests can be applied to see whether something is good. People with different views about the theology, psychology, or the nature of pleasure might come to different conclusions than Socrates and Philebus do, even when applying the same tests. And, as the *Philebus* draws to a close, Socrates mentions a test used by the hedonists, that he rejects: they appeal to the behaviour of non-rational animals, claiming that what is desired by them must be the good.²¹ The point is not that Socrates doesn't adapt his arguments to his interlocutor; rather, the point is that Socrates draws on highly general and abstract beliefs that Protarchus has, beliefs that have no obvious relation to what sort of person Protarchus is.

²¹ 67b

There is one, very important, argument in the *Philebus* where my case that this is going on must be rather involved, because the argument does involve eliciting Protarchus' preferences: this is the argument in which Socrates asks Protarchus to imagine the life of pure pleasure and the life of pure reason, and see whether he would like to live them; I will discuss this argument in detail in the next section. In the other cases, however, my claims are easy enough to see, and in this section I survey the easy cases.

The first argument against the claim that pleasure is the good in the *Philebus* exhibits these features clearly. Here, the proposed test is that things which are unlike good things are not themselves good, and, thus, if two things are very much unlike each other, then they will not both be good.²² This test condition might not be agreed on by everybody, but acceptance of the test condition will not depend on what someone is currently drawn to, or finds appealing. The claim draws its appeal from the idea that things dissimilar to each other in most respects are likely to have further dissimilarities.²³

Socrates attempts to apply the test to pleasures by arguing that some pleasures are unlike each other. He does this by listing pleasures held by people in opposite states: the moderate person and the licentious have pleasures, the wise person takes pleasure in wise considerations, while the foolish person takes pleasure in foolish beliefs. Socrates wishes to maintain that these pleasures are opposite, or at least dissimilar, to each other. Protarchus is, however, only

²² 13a-b

²³ This is the best I can do with the argument. Gosling, *Philebus*: 77 raises problems, but does no better, I think, at getting a good argument out of this. Further, he does not seem to mark the shift from Socrates' first speech that starts in 12e to the second one that starts in 13a. He seems too concerned to make the argument work with the predicate *opposite*, but clearly opposition is not necessary for this strategy. Another possibility for getting a good argument out here, in the spirit of Plato's Socrates, would be that if *A* is the good, and *B* is highly dissimilar from *A*, then *B* is not the good. If every pleasure is an instance of the good, then this principle might be problematic.

willing to accept that they are dissimilar up to a point: he maintains that they are similar, at least insofar as they are pleasures.²⁴ The claim that different people take pleasures in very different things is a matter of straightforward observation. The claim that this makes the pleasures different, or opposed to each other, requires further justification. For people have held that pleasure is unified, but that different people experience it under different circumstances, perhaps imagining that the different experiences called pleasure are unified by a shared phenomenology. But our views on the unity or otherwise of pleasure as a mental state are unlikely to be shaped by how much we desire pleasure; a pleasure hungry person may indeed find part of the appeal in pleasure's diversity.

In this argument, then, Socrates tries to argue from premises that lie distant from Protarchus' motivations, desires, inclinations and so on. He fails, since Protarchus rejects his premises, but Protarchus' rejection of them has to do with Protarchus' commitment to the claim that pleasure is the same, wherever it is found, rather than some feature of Protarchus' character.

We find a very similar tactic being used in Socrates' overarching method for determining which of reason and pleasure deserves second place:

Well then, I'm not arguing that the common life is more victorious than the one in accordance with the mind, but it is necessary to consider the second prizes and investigate what we shall do.²⁵ We might perhaps

²⁴ 12c-13c

²⁵ I'm taking τῶν δὲ δὴ δευτερείων ὁρᾶν as the rare use of the genitive following ὁρᾶν mentioned at LSJ II.e. In this case we ὁρᾶν τῶν δευτερείων, but we σκοπεῖν περὶ τί δράσομεν. I'm sure nothing rests on this construal; I mention it just because it's different from what one finds in Fowler and Frede, which take both verbs as governing both objects together. I'm respecting the plural in the Greek in my English, because I think the Greek importantly admits the possibility of a tie, although that is not the outcome Socrates expects.

each of us claim the cause of the good life, one of us that intellect is the cause, the other than pleasure, and thus although neither one of them would be the good, perhaps one might still think either one would be the cause. But I would rather contend²⁶ this against Philebus in relation to the mixed life, that what this life takes when it becomes good and choice worthy choice-worthy, is more closely related and similar to reason and not pleasure and following this argument neither the first nor again the second place will be said truly to belong to pleasure.²⁷

(*Philebus* 22c-e)

Socrates here considers two ways in which one might go about allocating second prize, sets the first one aside, and opts for the second. The first way involves seeing which is the cause of the mixed life: if we followed this strategy, we would allocate second place to whichever, reason or pleasure, was the cause of the mixed life. The second way is to consider which of pleasure is more similar or closely related to whatever is good in the mixed life, and this is the strategy that Socrates selects. Here again, the test uses notions of similarity and

²⁶ Fowler casts this sentence as follows: “On this point I might keep up the fight all the more against Philebus and contend”; as I understand Folwer’s English, he takes καὶ μάλλον to indicate an elaboration of the previous argument. I’m following Frede in taking the μάλλον as introducing an alternative argument strategy from the argument from causes. She translates “But I would be even more ready to contend against Philebus that.” In this case, I take it the primary difference is that we will expect an argument from *resemblance* rather than *causation* to be the overall strategy in what follows. In this case we might wonder why Socrates mentions the possibility of a causal investigation: perhaps he thinks it’s possible, but not in the time available, or not with an interlocutor as inexperienced as Protarchus.

²⁷ τῶν μὲν οὖν νικητηρίων πρὸς τὸν κοινὸν βίον οὐκ ἀμφισβητῶ πω ὑπὲρ νοῦ, τῶν δὲ δὴ δευτερείων ὁρᾶν καὶ σκοπεῖν χρὴ περὶ τί δράσομεν· τάχα γὰρ ἂν τοῦ κοινοῦ τούτου βίου αἰτιώμεθ’ ἂν ἑκάτερος ὁ μὲν τὸν νοῦν αἵτιον, ὁ δ’ ἡδονὴν εἶναι, καὶ οὕτω τὸ μὲν ἀγαθὸν τούτων ἀμφοτέρων οὐδέτερον ἂν εἴη, τάχα δ’ ἂν αἰτιὸν τις ὑπολάβοι πότερον αὐτῶν εἶναι. τούτου δὴ περὶ καὶ μάλλον ἔτι πρὸς Φίληβον διαμαχοίμην ἂν ὡς ἐν τῷ μεικτῷ τούτῳ βίῳ, ὅτι ποτ’ ἔστι τοῦτο ὃ λαβὼν ὁ βίος οὗτος γέγονεν αἰρετὸς ἅμα καὶ ἀγαθός, οὐχ ἡδονὴ ἀλλὰ νοῦς τούτῳ συγγενέστερον καὶ ὁμοιότερόν ἐστι, καὶ κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον οὐτ’ ἂν τῶν πρωτείων οὐδ’ αὖ τῶν δευτερείων ἡδονῇ μετὸν ἀληθῶς ἂν ποτε λέγοιτο·

dissimilarity, with the idea being that if you have something A, better than two other things B and C, whichever of B and C is more similar to A is better. This test is somewhat more reasonable than the previous one, though it is obviously far from flawless: a bad action movie might have more in common with a good one than a mediocre romantic comedy does, but the mediocre romantic comedy might still be the better film. Whether or not one will accept this as a way of testing which of two things are better is, however, once again something that has little to do with one's current inclinations and desires.

There is, of course, the risk that what features of a thing will be salient in a comparison will be determined by what I am drawn to. If what matters to me is the company, then all travel destinations might seem fairly similar to me, so long as I am travelling with the same people, whereas they will not if what matters to me is the weather.

When Socrates places his cards on the table, however, we find that he has placed himself on secure ground by choosing an example where the similarity is very hard to dispute. For, in the mixed life, Socrates will argue, the cause of goodness is the true, the fine, and the proportionate.²⁸ It would be difficult to find someone who would, because of their strong desire for pleasure, see pleasure as having more in common with the true and the proportionate than reason does. And Protarchus' answer about the fine makes it clear why it would be difficult to maintain that pleasure was more closely related to the fine than reason: he claims that many pleasures have a ridiculous effect on us, which we then seek to hide.²⁹

²⁸ 65b–66a

²⁹ 65e–66a. Some people seem to be proud of these ridiculous effects, such as people who brag about rather embarrassing things they did when intoxicated. However, if we accept that different people take pleasure in different things, we might imagine that people will be able to see the ridiculous effects of other people's favourite pleasures.

Although the test principle is one whose outcome would, in some cases, be influenced by a person's preferences and motivations, Socrates has chosen to apply it only in a case where these will be of minimal importance.

The next case is a striking illustration of the same phenomenon, where the test itself would, in many cases, be applied differently by people with different desires. The test is to see whether something is pursued for its own sake, or for the sake of something else. Things done for the sake of other things are less good than those done for their own sake. People do different things for their own sake: for some people, playing sport is the best part of their day and their reason for living; for others, it is a drag only to be done in order to remain healthy.

Socrates doesn't, however, simply ask Protarchus whether pleasure is something enjoyed for its own sake. For, put like that, Protarchus would likely enough have said that it was. Instead, Socrates produces an extended argument that pleasure is a coming to be, and comings-to-be are for the sake of something; therefore pleasure is for the sake of something.³⁰ Whether it is generally true that comings-to-be are for the sake of something, and whether pleasure is a coming-to-be are metaphysical questions, and the answers we give to them will not be heavily influenced by the desires and inclinations that we have. Socrates, again, argues in a way that avoids the way in which his interlocutors' desires shape the appearances of the world, and allows him to argue 'at odds' with person's character.

The final test, and its application, runs a little closer, I think, to a person's current set of desires and inclinations. For here, Socrates argues that the life without pleasure is the godliest

³⁰ These are the key steps of the argument that runs from 53c to 54d.

life, and Protarchus agrees that it would be surprising if the gods experienced pleasure.³¹ Here the idea is that the godliest life is also the best.³² Now, it is plausible that our ideas about the gods and the divine are informed by our fears and desires, and that the life we imagine gods living is somehow an expression of the life that we would like to live. But these claims hold at best in a loose and general way; the ideas we have about gods and the godly are certainly also ideas we inherit from the culture we grow up in, and so it is certainly not only our own desires that shape our notion of a divine life.³³ For this reason, a person's views on theology offer a standpoint independent from their dispositions and inclinations from which to argue.

These four cases constitute four out of five of the strategies that Socrates uses in the *Philebus* to draw a final inference about the goodness of things, that is, an inference that brings us all the way to the claim that something is good, is not the good, is better or worse than something else. And in each of these cases it is clear that Socrates tries to argue from premises that could be agreed on even by people who desired pleasure extremely strongly, to the exclusion of all other things. But there is one remaining strategy that Socrates adopts in the *Philebus*, where it seems on the surface that he makes a direct appeal to what Protarchus finds or does not find desirable; we will see in the next section that, if this argument is accurately reconstructed, we find a similar move to premises that would be accepted even by the most extremely pleasure-hungry interlocutors.

Section Three: Protarchus' Test

³¹ 33b-c

³² That it's the best for a person gets withdrawn at 62b-d

³³ Exactly which hedonists are being targeted here is unclear to me. Epicurus imagines gods who experience pleasure. Although Aristotle is not a hedonist, he does see at least some pleasures as having value, and his god also experiences pleasure.

In perhaps the most memorable part of the Philebus, Socrates asks Philebus to compare the life of intellect without pleasure, and the life of pleasure without intellect. The climax of this argument is the moment where Philebus realises that he would not choose the life of pleasure without intellect. I will translate this moment:

Soc: And since you truly would not have intellect and memory and knowledge and belief, it must be the case that you do not know first this very thing, if you are delighting or not delighting, since you are void of all wisdom?

Pro: It is necessary

Soc: And indeed thus it is necessary that if you do not have memory, that you will neither remember it when you have delighted in something, nor right when the pleasure is present, will any memory remain. And moreover since you truly have no belief, you will not believe yourself to be enjoying yourself when you are, and being deprived of reckoning it will also not be possible to reckon on it when you are about to enjoy yourself. You will not live the life of a human, but of some kind of jelly-fish or one of the things living in the ocean with a shelled body. Are these things so, or can we imagine them being otherwise?

Pro: But how?

Soc: Well then would such a life be choiceworthy for us?

Pro: This account that you have just given, Socrates, has cast me entirely into speechlessness³⁴ (*Philebus*, 21b-d)

In this moment, Socrates pushes Protarchus to the realisation that the life of pleasure without intelligence is not choiceworthy for us. For intelligence includes the capacities to remember, believe, and anticipate pleasure. By emphasising that lacking these capacities means not remembering or anticipating pleasure, or believing that one is experiencing it while one is doing so, Socrates sharpens Protarchus' vision of what it would be to live without intelligence. As a second consideration, Socrates compares such a life to that of a jellyfish or crustacean, and claims that such a life would not be a human life at all.

The argument in this passage depends on Protarchus finding such a life unattractive, of his having some attachment to his intellectual capacities, at least to the basic ones of memory, belief and anticipation. It is therefore an argument that only works on people whose characters are a certain way. This is reflected in the dialogue itself, since Philebus, who is listening to the argument, is unconvinced by it: Philebus, we are to think, sees no particular problem in living as a shellfish. With Philebus' character, Plato is telling us that there are

³⁴ ΣΩ. Νοῦν δέ γε καὶ μνήμην καὶ ἐπιστήμην καὶ δόξαν μὴ κεκτημένος ἀληθῆ, πρῶτον μὲν τοῦτο αὐτό, εἰ χαίρεις ἢ μὴ χαίρεις, ἀνάγκη δήπου σε ἀγνοεῖν, κενόν γε ὄντα πάσης φρονήσεως;

ΠΡΩ. Ἀνάγκη.

ΣΩ. Καὶ μὴν ὥσαύτως μνήμην μὴ κεκτημένον ἀνάγκη δήπου μὴδ' ὅτι ποτὲ ἔχαιρες μεμνησθαι, τῆς τ' ἐν τῷ παραχρῆμα ἡδονῆς προσπιπτούσης μὴδ' ἡντινοῦν μνήμην ὑπομένειν· δόξαν δ' αὖ μὴ κεκτημένον ἀληθῆ μὴ δοξάζειν χαίρειν χαίροντα, λογισμοῦ δὲ στερόμενον μὴδ' εἰς τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον ὡς χαιρήσεις δυνατόν εἶναι λογίζεσθαι, ζῆν δὲ οὐκ ἀνθρώπου βίον, ἀλλὰ τινος πλεύμονος ἢ τῶν ὅσα θαλάττια, μετ' ὁστρεῖνων ἔμψυχά ἐστι σωμάτων. ἔστι ταῦτα, ἢ παρὰ ταῦτα ἔχομεν ἄλλα διανοηθῆναι;

ΠΡΩ. Καὶ πῶς;

ΣΩ. Ἄρ' οὖν αἰρετὸς ἡμῖν βίος ὁ τοιοῦτος;

ΠΡΩ. Εἰς ἀφασίαν παντάπασί με, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὗτος ὁ λόγος ἐμβέβληκε τὰ νῦν.

some people who would be willing to give up even the most basic aspects of their intelligence, if they received enough pleasure in return; they would be willing even to become inhuman, if such a life would be pleasant.³⁵

I have been arguing that Socrates' arguments minimise the role of the interlocutor's character in whether they are persuasive. By arguing from premises that an interlocutor may believe, no matter what the relative strengths of their current desires and values are, Socrates provides arguments that can encourage people to work on changing these very desires. But here, he is doing quite the opposite.

In fact, this argument is only a step of a larger argument. We will see that the important point is not for the interlocutor to reject the life of pleasure without reason, but just to realise that it is a life that some people would reject.

Section Four: The Three Attributes

To understand the argument cited above, we need to backtrack a few lines, to where Plato introduces three tests of goodness. These tests are that the good should be complete (*teleos*), sufficient (*hikanos*), and desired and pursued by all creatures who know it.³⁶ The interpretation of these three criteria has been widely discussed. Their interpretation is of some

³⁵ This is not to say that such a decision would reflect their deepest desires, or who they really are: just that, given the choice right now, they would do this, and, to recall the contrast earlier with Callicles, this needn't have anything to do with the influence of other people.

³⁶ 20d1-10. The Greek of the third condition is: πᾶν τὸ γινώσκον αὐτὸ θηρεύει καὶ ἐφίεται βουλόμενον ἐλεῖν καὶ περὶ αὐτὸ κτήσασθαι, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων οὐδέν φροντίζει πλὴν τῶν ἀποτελουμένων ἅμα ἀγαθοῖς. Cooper, "Plato and Aristotle on Finality and (Self-)Sufficiency": 270 would prefer to translate *teleos* with 'final'. It will become clear in the discussion why I don't translate it this way.

importance to what I want to say about the argument, so I will discuss some of the issues. In particular, I want to argue that each of these tests does separate and important work in the argument, and that the third test is indeed about the psychological pull of the good, not, as has been suggested, actually about the choice-worthiness of the good.

In interpreting these tests, scholars frequently draw a parallel with *EN 1097a15-b20*.³⁷ The reasons for wishing to draw a parallel here are clear: Aristotle is also applying two tests of something being the good. One of them, that the good should be complete (*teleios*), actually occurs in the *Philebus*.³⁸ The other, that the good should be self-sufficient (*autarkēs*), seems closely related in meaning to sufficiency (*hikanos*): Aristotle defines the self-sufficient as “that which on its own makes life choiceworthy and lacking nothing (*mēdenos endea*)”³⁹, (1097b14-15) and this both seems like a natural way to understand sufficiency, and has a clear parallel with the text below, in which Socrates draws out the consequences of the good passing the tests:

Soc: (...) For it is necessary, if either is the good, that it should still be lacking nothing further⁴⁰ (*Phil.* 20e-21a)

The parallel promises to be very rich, for Aristotle offers definitions of both completeness and self-sufficiency, and the thought is that these will reveal what Plato meant in the *Philebus* by the similar conditions.

³⁷ Davidson, *Philebus*: 148-151 draws on this parallel particularly heavily.

³⁸ *Teleos* and *teleios* are alternative spellings of the same word.

³⁹ τὸ δ' αὐταρκες τίθεμεν ὃ μονούμενον αἰρετὸν ποιεῖ τὸν βίον καὶ μηδενὸς ἐνδεᾶ

⁴⁰ δεῖ γάρ, εἴπερ πότερον αὐτῶν ἔστ' ἀγαθόν, μηδὲν μηδενὸς ἔτι προσδεῖσθαι· δεόμενον δ' ἂν φανῇ πότερον, οὐκ ἔστι που τοῦτ' ἔτι τὸ ὄντως ἡμῖν ἀγαθόν.

We shouldn't, however, draw on this parallel to understand how Socrates used the terms. The most important difference between the two texts is, in fact, that Aristotle defines his terms and that Plato does not. In defining completeness (*teleios*), Aristotle is making it fairly clear that he is using the term in a technical and unusual way, drawing on its etymology, since the term comes from the word for end (*telos*). What Aristotle means by this word is better described as 'final', or even 'endish'. It means, roughly, that something tends to be an end. The least final things are those that are always done for the sake of something else, and the most final things are those that are only ever done for their own sake, and never for the sake of anything else. This is a very specific meaning of the term, related but significantly different from its usual meaning.⁴¹ The term usually means 'complete', as in perfect, or lacking nothing, or finished. It can be used to refer to a fully grown animal or human.

In the *Philebus*, the context in which the term is used is a conversation between Socrates and Protarchus. Protarchus is someone Socrates has just met, and Socrates certainly cannot expect him to be familiar with the technical vocabulary of the Academy. It is not likely that he introduced the term 'complete', meaning by this 'final' in a highly refined and technical way, without even mentioning to Protarchus that this was how he meant it. In any case, if this is what he was trying to get Protarchus to understand, he would have failed.

There are textual reasons as well to question the value of the parallel with Aristotle's passage.

The most important is this text from later in the *Philebus*:

⁴¹ This thought is supported by the fact that the *LSJ* doesn't contain the sense that Aristotle uses the term in here.

Soc: Thus all in all in this argument both intellect and pleasure were found to be indeed not good, but something other than them, since they lacked self-sufficiency (*autarkeias*) and the power of sufficiency and completeness.

⁴² (*Phil.* 67a)

The reason this text is a problem for drawing the parallel is that self-sufficiency is mentioned along with ‘the power of’ sufficiency and completeness. The most reasonable way to read this is that ‘the power of sufficiency and completeness’ is a gloss of self-sufficiency, for this text occurs in a summary of the argument, and the term self-sufficiency has not occurred before. But if this is the case, then, if Aristotle’s usage is consistent with Plato’s, the term self-sufficiency captures what Plato means by a combination of completeness and sufficiency, and his condition of ‘completeness’ ought to be something else, Plato’s already being covered. If the usage of these terms diverges, however, then the value of the parallel is significantly diminished. Either way, we cannot straightforwardly use the *EN* text as a parallel, taking self-sufficiency as replacement for sufficiency, and carrying the definition of completeness back to Plato.

The way I suggest proceeding with this passage is by seeing if there’s a natural way to take the terms to get two separate conditions that add up to *autarkeia*: being that which on its own, makes life choiceworthy. I will argue that there is. Starting with *hikanos*: if something is *hikanos*, it is sufficient. If you have it, you have enough: you don’t need to add anything further over and above it. The idea is that the good should be good enough to satisfy you. Commentators have thought that this is enough to ensure that the good is everything you

⁴² Οὐκοῦν παντάπασιν ἐν τούτῳ τῷ λόγῳ καὶ νοῦς ἀπῆλλακτο καὶ ἡδονὴ μὴ τοι τὰγαθόν γε αὐτὸ μηδ’ ἕτερον αὐτοῖν εἶναι, στερομένοιιν αὐταρκειᾶς καὶ τῆς τοῦ ἱκανοῦ καὶ τελέου δυνάμεως;

need. But there's another issue, and that's whether the good needs to work with something else to realise its value. Suppose that the good was to live in a beautiful place: that was enough, on its own, to make life choiceworthy. Then it would be sufficient. But if you couldn't *see*, then you wouldn't be able to enjoy the good. Living in a beautiful place would be incomplete, in a sense that it is missing one of the components needed to realise its value. These are two separate ideas: one is whether the good is good enough, the other is whether the good is dependent on anything outside itself.

I will illustrate this difference with another example, so that it will be clear. Suppose you are considering giving a child a remote controlled helicopter for their birthday. The question of whether it is *sufficient* is a question of whether it's enough to give just the helicopter, or whether you ought to give something else as well: say, a ticket on the trans-Siberian railroad, or a canoe. The question of whether it is *complete* is the question of what would count as making sure the child would have everything they needed to enjoy the helicopter. They might need batteries in addition to the helicopter. Perhaps you would need to arrange to take them to a park or a hall to play with it as well.⁴³ To receive an *incomplete* present is usually tantamount to receiving it late, but it could be like not receiving it at all: if the child can never get batteries for their helicopter, they may as well not have the helicopter. To receive an *insufficient* present is indeed to receive something, but not enough.

⁴³ Possible ancient equivalents: a bow without arrows; a game with too many missing pieces; a universe which doesn't have any sea-creatures in it (for a god-child).

A present cannot, on its own, make a birthday a happy one. But for a present to carry, on its own shoulders, the work of all birthday presents, it must meet the conditions of both sufficiency and completeness. As with birthday presents, so with the good.⁴⁴

Interpretative issues arise with the third condition as well. The full, initial statement of the third condition is as follows:

Everything that knows [*gignōskon*]⁴⁵ seeks it and longs for it, desiring to seize it and possess it and caring for nothing else except that which is filled up with goods⁴⁶ [*Phil.* 20d]

The interpretative issue here is about whether this condition is normative or psychological, that is, whether it means that creatures actually do pursue the good, or whether it means that the good is *choiceworthy*. On the face of it, it looks like a psychological condition, and this is the reading I will defend. However, several points speak in favour of the normative reading, so it is worth taking some time over it. First, commentators have taken the psychological claim that everything that knows the good seeks it to be implausible, and have tried to find a

⁴⁴ On this understanding, completeness blocks a possible objection of the hedonist to the final argument against Protarchus, which is: intelligence isn't adding anything or making pleasure better, it's just a pre-condition for fully appreciating pleasure. The way I am reading this, the objection would amount to saying: this only shows that pleasure is not complete, not that it is not sufficient.

⁴⁵ Frede translates "anything that has any notion of it", with the idea being presumably to handle the issue that, as we will see below, plants and animals are supposed to seek it. But the test isn't, in the next text, whether they have any awareness of the good, but whether they are capable of enjoying the good. I'm thus taking it as objectless, matching the contrast that Aristotle introduces in different words in discussing Eudoxus' arguments at *EN* 1173b35-a6. The idea then is that, to make it a fair contest between pleasure and knowledge, we restrict this test to those that know; those that do not know cannot, after all, seek knowledge.

⁴⁶ πᾶν τὸ γινώσκον αὐτὸ θηρεύει καὶ ἐφίεται βουλόμενον ἐλεῖν καὶ περὶ αὐτὸ κτήσασθαι, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων οὐδὲν φροντίζει πλὴν τῶν ἀποτελουμένων ἅμα ἀγαθοῖς

more charitable interpretation of the condition.⁴⁷ Second, Socrates and Protarchus refer back to the claim using a term that in ethical contexts typically means choice-worthy (*hairetos*).⁴⁸

Socrates' use of the psychological claim against hedonists, however, makes good sense. For the hedonists argued that pleasure was the good on the grounds that everything which sought anything sought pleasure.⁴⁹ A hedonist would thus be likely to accept the premise, both because they thought it happened to be true – everything does indeed seek the good, since everything seeks pleasure – and because they think it is to their advantage. Intellectual activities that are widely sought out, such as enjoying stories or riddles, are pleasant. And people who willingly spend time doing mathematics report the activity as pleasant; those who don't feel some kind of thrill or excitement or transcendental calm from mathematics tend to avoid it. This premise will thus not only seem harmless to Protarchus, but advantageous, and Socrates can ask for it expecting that Protarchus will accept it.

Let us discuss the fact that Socrates and Protarchus refer to this condition using the term *haireton*. In some instances, the question is whether the life in question *seems* choiceworthy to Protarchus, or to others. (21d, 21e) The question of who the life seems choiceworthy to is a question of psychological attractiveness: if the life of pleasure doesn't seem choiceworthy to Protarchus, then, arguably, he will not pursue it. So these examples shouldn't push us towards a normative reading of the condition. A stronger argument can be had from the following passage:

⁴⁷ See e.g. Tekku, *The Evaluation of Pleasure in Plato's Philebus*: 172.

⁴⁸ *LSJ A.II.2*

⁴⁹ A version of this argument is attested at 67b. Aristotle claims Eudoxus used it at *EN 1172b9-10*

Soc: Thus it seems from these that neither of these lives has the good; for then it would be sufficient and complete and choiceworthy to all plants and animals, for who it is possible to live thus throughout their whole life; and if one of us chose something else, they would be taking something against the nature of the really choiceworthy, constrained either by ignorance or by some unhappy necessity⁵⁰ (*Philebus* 22b)

Here, the three tests seem to be restated, with the third now being glossed with the term ‘choiceworthiness’, which is a compelling reason to opt for the normative claim. A close examination of the passage, however, reveals that matters are by no means so clear. For Socrates quickly draws something very similar to the psychological claim as an implication of the good’s choiceworthiness: if anyone chooses anything other than the good, then they must be constrained either by necessity or by ignorance. This matches the claim that every knowing creature seeks the good: if something is not choosing it, it’s either that they cannot, or that they are not knowing. But which point is Socrates using here?

The interpretative dispute is ultimately going to be decided by the question of what Socrates means here by *knowing*. Socrates may mean: anything which is sufficiently familiar with the good thing (e.g. has tasted it, has imagined it sufficiently clearly) will pursue it. Or he may mean: anything which realises that it is good will pursue it. This second possibility allows for creatures who are very familiar with the good, but who do not pursue it, simply because they do not recognise that it is good.

⁵⁰ Μῶν οὖν οὐκ ἤδη τούτων γε περὶ δῆλον ὡς οὐδέτερος αὐτοῖν εἶχε τἀγαθόν; ἦν γὰρ ἂν ἰκανὸς καὶ τέλος καὶ πᾶσι φυτοῖς καὶ ζώοις αἰρετός, οἷσπερ δυνατὸν ἦν οὕτως ἀεὶ διὰ βίου ζῆν· εἰ δέ τις ἄλλα ἡρεῖθ' ἡμῶν, παρὰ φύσιν ἂν τὴν τοῦ ἀληθοῦς αἰρετοῦ ἐλάμβανεν ἄκων ἐξ ἀγνοίας ἢ τινος ἀνάγκης οὐκ εὐδαίμονος.

Socrates' argumentation in the next section will involve laying out and making clear what the life of pure pleasure would really be like. It is unclear what the argumentative force of doing so is, if it is supposed to be possible to be familiar with something and still not recognise that it is good: Socrates has made us familiar with the life of pleasure, but if we are not drawn to it, the hedonist could simply argue that is because we do not recognise how good pleasure is. As we will see in the next section, however, if the condition is that everything that is familiar with the good will be attracted to it, then even if we find ourselves, like Philebus, still attracted to the life of pure pleasure, the psychological reading of the condition will make the plausibility of a character like Protarchus, who is not drawn to such a life, sufficient for showing that pleasure is not the good. For this reason, we should take the psychological reading.

Plato's three tests of the good, then, are the good should be *sufficient*, that is, it is good enough not to need any other good things beside it; that it is *complete*, that is, that its goodness can be realised without the addition of any further thing, and that it is *psychologically attractive*, that is, those who know it will desire and seek it.

Section Five: The Importance of the Tests

In this section, I will argue that these three tests are in fact used to construct an argument that can work on interlocutors, regardless of what their desires are: the argument is, roughly, that people like Protarchus won't choose the life of pure pleasure, and therefore pleasure is not the good. This is not a new reading of the argument, though I think I am able to better explain the

role of each of the tests in it; it is, however, a controversial reading, and it's worth reviewing the evidence in its favour, and to discuss the most developed alternative reading of the argument, that of Sylvain Delcomminette.⁵¹

The tests achieve two things: first, they allow a shift from talking about *pleasure*, and *intelligence*, to talking about the life of pure pleasure and the life of pure reason. And, second, they allow us to infer from what Protarchus finds choiceworthy to the goodness and badness of the lives in question.

How do these attributes of the good achieve this? Well, it's because of the inference Socrates makes at 22b, cited above: if a life holds the good, then the life will be desired by every knowing creature, sufficient, and complete. The thought behind this inference is not provided in the dialogue, but, if we were right in the way we understood the attributes of the good, then the line of reasoning is easy enough to reconstruct. The good itself is attractive, but it need not follow from this alone that a life with a great deal of the good was attractive: it could be that such a life was impoverished, because it stood in need of other goods; or it could be that in such a life we had the good, but not what was required to activate it. But because the good is complete and sufficient, neither of these problems arise: once you have the good, you have it all. If someone is drawn to the good, they will be drawn to a life full of the good as well.

This is an important shift from how the relationship between candidate goods and lives involving those goods was understood earlier in the text:

⁵¹ The reading I offer here is essentially that of Dorothea Frede, see *Philebos*: 169-178.

Soc: What then, when something else is shown to be better than these?
Would it not be then, that if it was more closely related to pleasure, that
although both would be less than the life which had this thing steadfastly,
that the life of pleasure defeated that of intelligence?⁵² [*Phil 11e-12a*]

Here, the life of X is the life that has that thing *steadfastly* (*bebaiōs*). I take it that what this means is that enjoying X is the predominant feature of the life through much of it. But it does not yet mean that X is enjoyed to the exclusion of the other contenders. The life of pleasure must involve, throughout the duration of the life, the enjoyment of frequent and intense pleasures; but there can still be room in it for intellectual activity; similarly, the life of intelligence need not be devoid of pleasure. The question is which thing should be given more importance.

With the acceptance that the good has the attributes of sufficiency and completeness, however, the claim that pleasure or intelligence is the good carries with it far greater implications. Not only must the advocate of intelligence think that a life largely devoted to intelligence is worth living, and more so than the life largely devoted to pleasure: the advocate of the life devoted to intelligence must think that it is worth living a life of intelligence, even if it contains no pleasure at all.

The addition of the third attribute entrenches the commitments further, and thus makes the claim relatively easy to disprove. For the third attribute is that the life should be psychologically attractive to *all* those who know it. Thus it becomes sufficient to exhibit just

⁵² Τί δ' ἂν ἄλλη τις κρείττων τούτων φανῇ; μὴν οὐκ, ἂν μὲν ἡδονῇ μᾶλλον φαίνεται συγγενής, ἡπτώμεθα μὲν ἀμφοτέρω τοῦ ταῦτα ἔχοντος βεβαίως βίου, κρατεῖ δὲ ὁ τῆς ἡδονῆς τὸν τῆς φρονήσεως;

one example of someone or something that knows what pleasure and intelligence are, and what a life of them would involve, and is not drawn to either, to show that neither of them is the good.⁵³ But whether any one person who understood what they were would fail to be drawn to them is an empirical question. Even someone who desired the good so much that they would accept the life of a contented jellyfish or a shellfish could be brought to see that not everybody would accept such a life, and so, if they have accepted that the good has the attributes of attractiveness, completeness, and sufficiency, they have been shown that the good is other than what they desire.

Read like this, the argument takes on many of the features that we are claiming Socratic arguments have. It's an argument that works quite independently from the audience's desires. It starts from considerations whose importance is not immediately obvious: here, abstract features of the good. And the argument is likely, I think, to seem at first ridiculous, particularly to someone who already believes that pleasure is the good: the abstract discussion about attributes of the good is difficult, and easy to get wrong, and the argument could be waved away as fanciful. And without considering it too carefully, the examples of the jellyfish and the shellfish match well with Alcibiades' characterisation of Socrates as talking about tanners and donkeys: a person listening inattentively might well wonder how jelly-fish and oysters got into it, and dismiss the idea that this was the life the hedonist was even talking about. Nevertheless, the puzzle for the hedonists is severe: for, even if the conditions on the good are incorrect, they are conditions that must apply to the good if simple experiences of pleasure are the only good things.

⁵³ The point that the third attribute is universally quantified, and so needs only one example to disprove, has been seen by Frede, *Philebos*: 175-176.

This reading of the argument makes every one of Socrates' moves hold considerable weight. The main alternative reading is that Plato assumes that the reader will identify with Protarchus, and that the reader will conclude that pleasure is not the good for the same reasons that Protarchus does. This idea is not usually explicitly developed, but Sylvain Delcomminette provides us with a clear statement of the view:⁵⁴

Indeed, Socrates and Protarchus have agreed that the good has to be worthy of choice for everything that knows it. Nonetheless, they will use this criterion rather differently from the hedonists: they will not rely on the behaviour of every living creature, taking the universality of appearances as a criterion, but they will limit their investigation to a single living being, Protarchus himself, and they will examine, *from the inside*, if the life that he defends is truly worthy of choice. (...) The criterion of knowledge is clearly essential: it shows that this procedure will reveal to us not only Protarchus' opinion on the matter, but the opinion that *every* person placed in the same situation would be forced to adopt.⁵⁵

The last sentence gives the essence of the thought: Protarchus is not just speaking for himself, but speaking for everyone: the reasons that Socrates presents him are reasons that are valid

⁵⁴ For an example of a commentator who assumes this view without statement, see Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*: 332-334.

⁵⁵ *Philèbe*: 170, my translation of: Or Socrate et Protarque se sont accordés sur le fait que le bien doit être digne de choix pour tout ce qui le connaît. Pourtant; la manière dont ils utiliseront ce critère sera très différente de celle des hédonistes: ils ne se fieront pas au comportement de tous les êtres vivants, en prenant l'universalité des apparences comme critère, mais limiteront leur investigation à un seul être vivant—Protarque lui même—et examineront *de l'intérieur* si la vie qu'il défend est vraiment digne de choix. (...) Le critère de la connaissance est évidemment essentiel: il montre que ce procédé ne nous révélera pas seulement l'opinion de Protarque sur la question, mais ce que *toute* personne placée dans la même situation serait forcée de reconnaître:

for anyone, and so, too, the reader: we are to be convinced by the same arguments that Protarchus is to be convinced by. And many readers think they have found some such argument in the *Philebus*: either, the point that living such a life would force us to give up an element of our humanity is supposed to do the trick, or, as Delcomminette will argue, we are supposed to see that in the life of pure pleasure, there would be no *experience* of pleasure at all.⁵⁶

To read the argument this way is partly to put aside the observation, made above, that a claim of universal psychological attraction can be refuted with one counter-example. And, in Delcomminette's case, the motivation clearly comes partly from reading the third criteria normatively. But the motivation to read the text this way also, it seems to me, springs from the view that Socrates does not simply say something like "not everybody would, however, be attracted to such a life", but presents *reasons* why the life is unattractive. We need to make sense of why Plato has him do this, if it is not simply because he thinks the reader will find the same reasons compelling.

But our very problem with which we started is that Socrates does not so much provide reasons, as draw out in detail what living a life without intelligence would involve. Protarchus appears to have failed to take into account that a life of pure pleasure will involve no belief in the pleasure, no anticipation or memory of the pleasure; that is, he has failed to imagine the life accurately. Socrates' argument, such as it is, is mostly an exercise of drawing attention to aspects of the life that Protarchus might find unappealing. As mentioned in the previous section, this speaks in favour of taking the third condition as being psychological

⁵⁶ This is developed at 172-183. The problem with this line is that there can still be *perception* of pleasure, even if not a fully human experience of it, as argued by Frede, *Philebos*: 178.

attractiveness: the argument simply does not have the resources to show that the life is not *choiceworthy*. Even if we think, with Delcominette, that we as readers are supposed to see along with Protarchus that such a life is not choiceworthy, the normative reading leaves open the possibility of being perfectly familiar with the good and not realising that it is good: there is nothing in Socrates' argument to protect us against the possibility of such an error. If Socrates understands the condition normatively, then his argument here is weak; if he understands it psychologically, his argument is strong.

One possible response here would be to say that when Socrates states that the life is not the life of a human, but that of a jellyfish or a sea-lung, this is an essential premise of the argument. The bridging principle could be that only human lives are choiceworthy for humans, and that the lives of jellyfish and sea-lungs are not. But unlike the claim that all things actually do pursue the good (the good being pleasure), Socrates opponents would reject this principle. Ancient hedonists, after all, emphasise that pleasure is pursued by all animals, and is the good of all animals, so why should they not think that some jellyfish lives are more choiceworthy than some human lives? It is better, I think, to see this as an illustration that drives home the point and clarifies to Protarchus exactly what is involved in the life of pure pleasure.

If this is the exercise, however, then it's not clear that Socrates takes himself to be offering reasons that everybody would have to accept in the same situation, and that the reader must identify with Protarchus. Instead, the exercise could be understood as one being of making clear to both the reader and Protarchus what Protarchus is being asked. The reader might not be ready to believe in a Protarchus who would not be drawn to a life of extreme pleasures:

they might think that either he was dishonest, or a character found only in Plato's fiction, but not real life. But when these details of the life are drawn out, and it is made clear how many things are missing from the life of pure pleasure, the reader, even if they themselves like the idea of living the life of a jellyfish, must find Protarchus' rejection of the life understandable and plausible. Protarchus' refusal is important in this context not because everyone would make it, but because even a die-hard hedonist who envies a happy jellyfish can see that there are people like Protarchus who would not wish at all to live in such a way.

Reading Socrates' and Protarchus' discussion of the life of pure pleasure as doing more than what I have outlined above requires pulling out of Socrates' short, final discourse more of an argument than is to be found there, and elaborating its presuppositions and suppressed premises, and it requires us either to convert the psychological attractiveness attribute of the good into choiceworthiness, or it requires us seeing it as unused. The reading I am suggesting allows us to see in Socrates' final discourse no more than what is written there, and to appreciate the importance to the argument of the agreement that Socrates has elicited from Protarchus, that the good is attractive to everyone. If we find here an argument that the life of pure pleasure is not choiceworthy, what would be lost if Socrates never asked for his third criteria, and simply argued that the life was not good? A similar consideration question can be asked of those who think that this argument shows the reader what they really desire: if this is how the argument works, why should Socrates bother securing agreement from Protarchus that the good exerts a psychological attraction on all who know it?

The shellfish and jellyfish turn out, then, to be like donkeys and tanners: rather superficial elements of the argument. It does not matter much if we, ourselves, see nothing wrong with

living a happy crustacean life. What matters the most are the attributes we think the good has. This question is an abstract, theoretical question, and does not elicit our current desires. It is thus a question whose answer can reveal to us that the desires we currently have are somehow wrong, either out of balance or entirely misdirected. The power of Socrates' argument from Protarchus' preferences is not that his are ours, but that the hedonists have tried to convince us that what all creatures desire is pleasure, and that pleasure will satisfy their desires all on its own; Socrates' exchange with Protarchus shows us that this is not true, and that at least some creatures would find a life of only pleasure entirely unappealing.

Conclusions

The resources for reconstructing the strategies of argument in the *Philebus* are in some ways more limited than what we would ideally like to have. Most significantly, in analysing Socrates' argument schemes, we have had to content ourselves to those found in the text itself, as Plato did not leave behind a rich repository of Socratic argument strategies as Aristotle did with the *Topics*. My hope is that this chapter has nevertheless shown that such an approach can be fruitful, at least insofar as it helps bring new considerations to a tricky exegetical point in the *Philebus*.

I have suggested in this chapter that Socrates' understanding of the goals of investigation into the good are strongly shaped by the specific and idiosyncratic understanding of the protreptic task that Plato portrays him as holding. This would lead him to reject rhetorical argumentation as useful for discussing the good, and, I suggested, explains the rift between him and the hedonistic tradition portrayed in the *Gorgias* and the *Philebus*. So far back as we

can trace the story, then, the evidence is suggestive that this disagreement about the argumentative context and goals of arguments was expressed through selection of argument strategies or schemes, and that this in turn shaped theories of the good. When we turn to Aristotle, we will see that even rather subtle differences in understanding of these issues can contribute to significant departures in argumentation and theory about the good.

~Aristotle~

Part One: Aristotle's Argumentative Context

Aristotle's understanding of the argumentative context in the *EN* is rather different from Socrates' in the *Philebus*. I shall state it straight out, and then, in this chapter, discuss the texts in which I find the support for each of the elements of his answer. The next chapter will be devoted to showing how Aristotle's choice of argument scheme in the *EN* is shaped by his understanding of the argumentative context.

Aristotle's understanding of the argumentative context can be broken down into three components, as follows:

1. *The Dialectical Aspect:* The study of what is good is primarily an investigation of a first principle. Such an investigation cannot go beyond a critical examination lying within the powers of someone with well-honed abilities at evaluating arguments in general. If knowledge of ethics is possible, this is because an ability to argue well in general, perhaps in combination with our other epistemic capacities, to bring us to a state in which we can know what the highest good is;

2. *The Limited Protreptic Aspect:* Aristotle's arguments are an attempt to help people with a minimally good character to orient themselves towards the good. As such, they can only presuppose a level of moral knowledge possessed by such people. Nevertheless, Aristotle is considerably less optimistic than Socrates about the transformative power of argument;
3. *The Ranking Aspect:* The most important thing to do is correctly to identify the best thing. Philosophical argument should primarily help in saying which of two or more things already thought to be good is the better, and the second priority should be to identify possible candidates for the best thing. Being wrong about what is second- or third-best is of little practical importance, and in any case, the lower ranking goods can be determined through knowledge of the highest ranking good. This is another way in which Aristotle's answer differs from Socrates' in the *Philebus*, which is largely concerned about allocating second prizes.

I will divide this chapter into three sections, and in each section I will elaborate on and justify these claims about Aristotle. First, however, I would like to emphasise some of the differences between Aristotle's answer and Socrates'.

These three aspects of Aristotle's arguments reflect some similarities, and some differences, with those of Socrates in the *Philebus* arguments. That the arguments should not be the domain of a specialist, but rather the sort of arguments that someone with sound general knowledge and general reasoning abilities can construct and evaluate, is something they have in common. If Socrates wishes to use philosophical arguments to turn people towards better lives, then they better be arguments that can be understood by their audience. In his

discussions with Protarchus and Philebus, he does not draw on any deep specialised knowledge that they might have. But Aristotle's explanation here is different: the goodness of things can only be studied through lay arguments, because the identity of the human good is a first principle (or at least, it is the first principle of practical reasoning).¹ The basic point, which I will elaborate in section one, is that first principles must be presupposed within a specialist field, so they cannot be the result of reasoning particular to that specialist field. An important upshot of this is that, although the premises Aristotle draws on must be things that are widely known, they must also be true; Socrates, on the other hand, can simply draw from premises that his interlocutors are likely to believe.

The second aspect marks a clear difference with Plato's Socrates' arguments. We saw how Socrates went out of his way, in the *Philebus*, to argue in such a way that Protarchus could be convinced, no matter what he was currently driven to pursue. While I think Aristotle thought it was *possible* to argue for his claim about the highest good from premises that even someone terribly vicious could accept, I think he thought such an exercise was a waste of time, as it would at best result in people with true beliefs who continued to act viciously. If you happen to think that Aristotle thought habituation was the only way to provide justification for the starting points of the arguments of the *EN*, then that will also justify seeing Aristotle's *protreptic* project as limited in the relevant way: Aristotle's arguments can presuppose a higher level of agreement about what is desirable than Socrates' in the *Philebus*. And thus Aristotle uses arguments that Socrates would have avoided using, and which, from the point of view of Socrates' objectives, are failures.

¹ It is possible that the first principle in ethics could be a derived result in another science, that is, the science described in the *Metaphysics*. In this case the derivation would start from our knowledge of the nature of the final cause of the cosmos. This is not how Aristotle proceeds in the *EN*.

The third aspect also marks an important difference between Socrates in the *Philebus* and Aristotle in the *EN*. For the argument in the *Philebus*, relatively quickly, becomes an argument about second place, and the *Philebus* concludes with a ranking of the top five goods. For Aristotle, however, the purpose of inquiry is only to identify the highest good. There are two reasons for this. The first is that the highest good plays a strikingly powerful role in Aristotle's account of practical reasoning; the appropriate amount of a lesser good to pursue is that which will best enable pursuit of the highest good.² The second is that the ranking of other goods can be derived within the science of ethics once the highest good has been identified, perhaps by considering how similar to the highest good each is.³

When the purpose of inquiry is to correctly identify which goods hold places other than first, it is important to be able not only to give reasons for thinking that something might be a good, and to give reasons why something might be better than something else, but also to argue why something that appears to be a good is not actually one. But when you are only concerned about first place, the discounting of merely apparent goods becomes unimportant, so long as you are sufficiently confident that you can rank goods well enough that you won't accidentally place a merely apparent good in the best position. This should make us suspect a tendency in Aristotle to judge things that appear to be good as good, which we do not find in Plato.

² Where the highest good is unobtainable, however, a lesser good may be pursued in its stead. See e.g. *De Cael.* 292a–b.

³ Suggested again at *De Cael.* 292a–b. See also Richardson Lear, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good*.

The importance in these differences lies in how we should approach evaluating the arguments we find in the *Philebus* and in the *EN*, if we are to evaluate them against the author's conception of the problem. In the context of the *EN*, we should make allowances for arguments that assume a certain level of agreement about how to orient one's life, assess arguments as part of a search for the highest good, and not worry much about inaccuracies that might be introduced for second or third place, and only see arguments as successful if their premises are true. In the context of the *Philebus*, by contrast, the test for acceptability of a premise is whether it is likely to be accepted by certain people; we should reject arguments that depend on the interlocutor already being oriented towards the good; and we should pay considerable scrutiny to the case for assigning things to second and third place. More generally, we should ask the question in the case of the *EN* of whether it is a good attempt at arguing for the foundations of practical reasoning, whereas in the *Philebus* the question should be whether Socrates' arguments work to bring the interlocutor to see that they are mistaken about their orientation towards the goodness of things.

Section One: The Dialectical Aspect

In this section, I will argue that because the good is a first principle, we should expect arguments that Aristotle presents in a search to determine what the good is to be *dialectical*, and I will explain how we should understand this claim. The ground I cover will be reasonably familiar, but I want to make a few observations along the way that I believe are new, and some that, although not new, are sometimes overlooked, and for this reason I will spend a little time with the material. Broadly speaking, I will claim that, for Aristotle, a first principle in a science is something that can be known without demonstration; that he suggests

we come to know these in a number of different ways; that the only way that seems to involve much argumentation is dialectic, and so we should expect, when Aristotle is arguing about first principles, that he is arguing dialectically, whatever that means.

I will then turn to saying what it does and doesn't mean. Here, the evidence is a little slim, but what we have points to a philosophically respectable position. The evidence we have suggests that Aristotle uses the term *dialectic* in two ways: one in opposition to philosophy, and one not. When he uses the term in opposition to philosophy, the point of contrast is dialectic's *interpersonal* nature: dialectic, when it is opposed to philosophy, is an art of arguing with other people using questions and answers. Dialectic looks to what other people believe, whereas philosophy looks to what is true. In other places, however, dialectic is something *made use of in philosophy*. In these contexts, we should drop these points of contrast: dialectic ceases to be something interpersonal, and it ceases to be enough to argue from what the audience believes: you must try to argue from those things your audience is likely to truly believe. But if we make these observations, we need some other way to characterise dialectic.

I argue that the *Topics* offers a perfectly reasonable way to characterise dialectic that removes its interpersonal element. We can characterise dialectic as a general ability that allows us to discuss all matters at the best level possible for lay people. We can, using the *Topics*, say a little more about what will allow us to discuss matters at this level: the ability rests on having a wide general knowledge, gained from familiarity with both what is widely believed, and what is believed by experts; the ability to spot ambiguities, similarities, and differences; and the internalisation of common patterns of argument, or *topoi*. I will tentatively suggest that

the reason such an ability is sometimes sufficient for investigations into first principles is that, for knowledge in a field to be possible, the first principles must be at least within grasp without drawing on specialist knowledge, and that this is part of what is meant by saying that they are by nature knowable: through dialectic, we can learn things not already known to us, but easily known by nature.⁴ More specialised abilities are required for things not already known to us, and not easy to know by nature.

Let us turn now to what I will call Aristotle's *problem of first principles*. In the *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle considers what counts as understanding (*epistemē*). First, he registers it is possible to understand through demonstration:

Even if there is another kind of understanding, which we will discuss later, we say that there is at any rate understanding through demonstration. I call a demonstration an epistemic syllogism. I call epistemic those things such that we know by having them. Now if understanding is as we said, it is necessary that demonstrative understanding has premises that are true and primary and unmediated and better known and earlier and the causes of the conclusion.⁵

(*APo*, 71b16-21)

⁴ Stephen Menn pointed out to me that grasping some first principles may also require upwards causal reasoning, and that upward causal reasoning is not dialectic. Given that *epagogē* is one of the kinds of argument with which dialectic deals, I am not sure that upwards causal reasoning cannot be dialectical. Either way, the upwards causal reasoning should be a general ability, possible prior to the establishment of a scientific discipline. This also does not necessarily mean that the reasoning will be straight-forwards: one might need the general ability of reasoning to an extremely high degree in order to grasp some of the first principles. First principles of a science will probably not, for all that, be the hardest things to grasp, as some of the results derived from them will be even harder, as they require first grasping the first principles first.

⁵ Εἰ μὲν οὖν καὶ ἕτερος ἔστι τοῦ ἐπίστασθαι τρόπος, ὕστερον ἐροῦμεν, φαιδὲν δὲ καὶ δι' ἀποδείξεως εἰδέναι. ἀπόδειξιν δὲ λέγω συλλογισμόν ἐπιστημονικόν· ἐπιστημονικὸν δὲ λέγω καθ' ὃν τῷ ἔχειν αὐτὸν ἐπιστάμεθα. εἰ τοίνυν ἐστὶ τὸ ἐπίστασθαι οἷον ἔθεμεν, ἀνάγκη καὶ τὴν ἀποδεικτικὴν ἐπιστήμην ἐξ ἀληθῶν τ' εἶναι καὶ πρώτων καὶ ἀμέσων καὶ γνωριμωτέρων καὶ προτέρων καὶ αἰτίων τοῦ συμπεράσματος.

The important thing for our consideration is the requirement on understanding of the premises being *true* and *unmediated*. Aristotle explains this condition shortly later:

The premises must be primary and without demonstration, because otherwise they will not be known without a demonstration of them.⁶ (*APo*, 71b26-28)

The premises of the explanatory syllogism produce knowledge of the conclusion; they cannot do that, if they are not themselves known. That explains the condition of being *without demonstration*. But what about the condition of being *primary*, what is meant by this? I take it that it is meant as the superlative formed from *pro*, the comparative of which, “prior to”, is explained by Aristotle in the following passage⁷:

Prior and better known is two-fold. For it is not the same to be prior by nature and prior in respect to us, nor to be better known and better known for us. And I call that earlier and better known in respect to us that which is closer to perception something, and that which is better known without qualification that which is further away from sense perception. And, mostly, the things furthest away from sense perception

⁶ ἐκ πρώτων δ' ἀναποδείκτων, ὅτι οὐκ ἐπιστήσεται μὴ ἔχων ἀπόδειξιν αὐτῶν

⁷ I am not entirely sure what kind of ordering the *prior* relationship is, but I suspect it is a partial order, and that the *first* things are *minima* in the sense that they are things to which nothing is *prior*, but to which not everything is *posterior*. E.g the other things that are first.

are general, the things closest are the particulars. And they are the opposite of each other.⁸ (*APo* 71b34-2a5)

From the above passage, it sounds as though the categories “prior in respect to us” and “prior by nature” are fixed: *us* here appears to mean something like *human beings*. But this is not Aristotle’s only treatment of the terms, and elsewhere it becomes clear that the term “prior to us” means “prior to the people investigating”:

And this is the task: just as in practical matters we make the things generally good good for each person, so is our task, starting from what is better known to someone, to make the things known by nature known to them. The things primary and known to each person are often barely known, and contain little or nothing of being.⁹ (*Met* 1029b3-12)

Here we find again the term “better known”, and the term “prior”, indexed to particular people. The task of investigation is to start from the things better known (and prior) to a particular person, and to use them to make the things that are better known (and prior) by nature better known and prior to the particular person.

⁸ πρότερα δ’ ἐστὶ καὶ γνωριμώτερα διχῶς· οὐ γὰρ ταῦτόν πρότερον τῇ φύσει καὶ πρὸς ἡμᾶς πρότερον, οὐδὲ γνωριμώτερον καὶ ἡμῖν γνωριμώτερον. λέγω δὲ πρὸς ἡμᾶς μὲν πρότερα καὶ γνωριμώτερα τὰ ἐγγύτερον τῆς αἰσθήσεως, ἀπλῶς δὲ πρότερα καὶ γνωριμώτερα τὰ πορρώτερον. ἔστι δὲ πορρωτάτω μὲν τὰ καθόλου μάλιστα, ἐγγυτάτω δὲ τὰ καθ’ ἕκαστα· καὶ ἀντίκειται ταῦτ’ ἀλλήλοις.

⁹ καὶ τοῦτο ἔργον ἐστίν, ὥσπερ ἐν ταῖς πράξεσι τὸ ποιῆσαι ἐκ τῶν ἐκάστω ἀγαθῶν τὰ ὅλως ἀγαθὰ ἐκάστω ἀγαθὰ, οὕτως ἐκ τῶν αὐτῶ γνωριμωτέρων τὰ τῇ φύσει γνώριμα αὐτῶ γνώριμα. τὰ δ’ ἐκάστοις γνώριμα καὶ πρῶτα πολλάκις ἡρέμα ἐστὶ γνώριμα, καὶ μικρὸν ἢ οὐθὲν ἔχει τοῦ ὄντος

As we saw above, things that are primary can be understood without demonstration, and this explains the distinction. We might not need a demonstration to understand them, because we already have some grasp of them; or we might not need a demonstration to understand them, simply because they are the sort of things that are naturally able to be fully understood without a demonstration.

Aristotle argues that there are things that can naturally be fully known without demonstration by raising problems for the view that there is no knowledge without demonstration. The argument is roughly this: either, one achieves knowledge via a finite number of demonstrations, or an infinite. If one achieves knowledge through a finite number of demonstrations, then some premises are undemonstrated, and so not known, and knowledge does not arise. Or one achieves knowledge through an infinite number of demonstrations; but that requires traversing an infinite series, and that is impossible.¹⁰ On the basis of this argument, Aristotle acknowledges a second kind of knowledge:

And we say that not all knowledge is demonstrative, but that there is non-demonstrative knowledge of the unmediated things, and we say these things, and we say that there is not only knowledge but the start of knowledge, by which we understand definitions.¹¹ (*APo* 72b18–25)

So knowledge starts from premises that are unmediated, and not in need of demonstration. But they are also premises that people don't necessarily know, because they are the things

¹⁰ *APo.* 5-17

¹¹ Ἡμεῖς δέ φαμεν οὔτε πᾶσαν ἐπιστήμην ἀποδεικτικὴν εἶναι, ἀλλὰ τὴν τῶν ἀμέσων ἀναπόδεικτον [I omit the text in brackets] ταῦτά τ' οὖν οὕτω λέγομεν, καὶ οὐ μόνον ἐπιστήμην ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀρχὴν ἐπιστήμης εἶναι τινά φαμεν, ἣ τούτους ὄρους γνωρίζομεν.

that are most primary by nature, rather than the things that are most primary to us. With these points on the table, we are in a position to state the problem of first principles for Aristotle: how do you go from not understanding the first principles to understanding them, without making use of a demonstration?

I am not going to attempt to reconstruct Aristotle's overall answer to this question, for he says many things in relation to it, and it seems likely that it was a problem he returned to many times, and perhaps never finally answered. For example, in the much discussed closing passage in *Posterior Analytics* 2.19, Aristotle says:

It is clear that it is necessary that the first principles are known by induction.
For in this way perception plants the universal.

Now since the things related to intelligence by which we grasp the truth, some are always true, others can be false, for example, belief, opinion and calculation, while intellection and knowledge are always true, and no other kind of knowledge is more precise than intellection, and the first principles of a demonstration are better known, and all knowledge is with an account, there will be no knowledge of the first principles, since there can be no clearer knowledge than intellection, therefore there is intellection of the first principles, which follows from the fact that demonstration cannot be the

beginning of demonstration, nor, as a result, knowledge of knowledge.¹²

(*APo* 100b3-15)

There are several problems with interpreting this passage that I won't deal with here. A very important issue is whether Aristotle offers one or two methods for finding first principles. He mentions both 'induction' and 'intellection' in this passage. There are different suggestions for how to reconcile this, including seeing intellection as a solution to the inadequacy of induction. Barnes suggests that intellection is the state that grasps the principles, while induction is the method by which they are grasped. A second issue is that readers often expect somewhere in *APo* II.19 an explanation of how the truth of first principles is guaranteed and ensured. This is about as good as it gets, and readers are left expecting something more. Some try to solve this by finding such an explanation in the passage, others by explaining why we shouldn't have expected this from the passage in the first place.¹³

I mention the passage here only to emphasise that, if either intellection, or induction, or some combination is how we come to know first principles, and if the identity of the good is a first

¹² δῆλον δὲ ὅτι ἡμῖν τὰ πρῶτα ἐπαγωγῇ γνωρίζειν ἀναγκαῖον· καὶ γὰρ ἡ αἴσθησις οὕτω τὸ καθόλου ἐμποιεῖ.

Ἐπεὶ δὲ τῶν περὶ τὴν διάνοιαν ἕξεων αἷς ἀληθεύομεν αἱ μὲν αἰεὶ ἀληθεῖς εἰσιν, αἱ δὲ ἐπιδέχονται τὸ ψεῦδος, οἷον δόξα καὶ λογισμός, ἀληθὴ δ' αἰεὶ ἐπιστήμη καὶ νοῦς, καὶ οὐδὲν ἐπιστήμης ἀκριβέστερον ἄλλο γένος ἢ νοῦς, αἱ δ' ἀρχαὶ τῶν ἀποδείξεων γνωριμώτεροι, ἐπιστήμη δ' ἅπαντα μετὰ λόγου ἐστί, τῶν ἀρχῶν ἐπιστήμη μὲν οὐκ ἂν εἴη, ἐπεὶ δ' οὐδὲν ἀληθέστερον ἐνδέχεται εἶναι ἐπιστήμης ἢ νοῦν, νοῦς ἂν εἴη τῶν ἀρχῶν, ἕκ τε τούτων σκοποῦσι καὶ ὅτι ἀποδείξεως ἀρχὴ οὐκ ἀπόδειξις, ὥστ' οὐδ' ἐπιστήμης ἐπιστήμη.

¹³ For an answer of the second kind, see Tuominen's "Back to the Posterior Analytics II 19". David Bronstein in "The Origin and Aim of Posterior Analytics II.19" argues that the chapter is not about methods at all, but about the prior knowledge that allows us to grasp first principles, and that this prior knowledge is perception. If Bronstein's account is correct, then the *APo* should make us suspect argumentation about first principles that always started from perceptual premises. For a recent attempt to give the first kind of answer, see Fine, "Aristotelian Inquiry": 215-221.

principle, this would shape the kind of arguments we'd expect to find. If induction really is, as Barnes suggests, the method, we'd expect to find solely inductive arguments. And if intellection is somehow the method, then how we understand this would determine what kind of arguments we would find as well, though here we might be more generous, since we might suppose that argumentation of quite a wide range is required to allow *nous* to see the principles clearly.

In another text, Aristotle seems to take a catholic approach to the first principles:

Some first principles are seen by induction, others by sense perception, others by some habituation, others in some other way.¹⁴ (*EN 1098b5*)

Again, these possibilities would be fairly limiting for the kind of argumentation we would expect to find about first principles. Taking this passage seriously, we'd expect to find primarily inductive arguments, since things known by sense perception and habituation are not known through argumentation.

From the point of view of understanding the argumentation Aristotle employs in searching for the first principles, the most important clue comes from the following text in the *Topics*:

After the things we have said we should talk about towards how many and what things the treatise is useful. It is useful towards three things: training, encounters, and branches of understanding in accordance with philosophy.

¹⁴ τῶν ἀρχῶν δ' αἱ μὲν ἐπαγωγῇ θεωροῦνται, αἱ δ' αἰσθήσει, αἱ δ' ἐθισμῷ τινί, καὶ ἄλλαι δ' ἄλλως.

That it is useful for training, is self-evident. For once we have the discipline, we will more easily be able to attack a thing that has been set down. That it is useful for encounters, because having summed up the beliefs of the many we will be able to discuss with them from their own beliefs and not from different ones, we will lead them in a different direction when they seem to us to speak badly. For the philosophical branches of knowledge, because when we can work through the problems on both sides, we will more easily be able to see the true and the false. Moreover towards the first principles of the things about each branch of understanding. For since it is not possible to say something about them from the things proper to the science in question, since the first principles are the first of all of them, it is necessary to discuss them through the reputable opinions about each one. And this is peculiar, or at least most proper, to dialectic. For being fitted for examination, it has a path towards the first principles of every method.¹⁵ (*Topics 101a25-b4*)

This passage outlines the uses of the *Topics*. Three uses are advertised: uses for training, for encounters, and for philosophical knowledge.¹⁶ The main use for the branch of philosophical

¹⁵ Ἐπόμενον δ' ἂν εἴη τοῖς εἰρημένοις εἰπεῖν πρὸς πόσα τε καὶ τίνα χρήσιμος ἢ πραγματεία. ἔστι δὴ πρὸς τρία, πρὸς γυμνασίαν, πρὸς τὰς ἐντεύξεις, πρὸς τὰς κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν ἐπιστήμας. ὅτι μὲν οὖν πρὸς γυμνασίαν χρήσιμος, ἐξ αὐτῶν καταφανές ἐστι· μέθοδον γὰρ ἔχοντες ῥᾶον περὶ τοῦ προτεθέντος ἐπιχειρεῖν δυνησόμεθα· πρὸς δὲ τὰς ἐντεύξεις, διότι τὰς τῶν πολλῶν κατηριθμημένοι δόξας οὐκ ἐκ τῶν ἁλλοτρίων ἀλλ' ἐκ τῶν οἰκείων δογμάτων ὁμιλήσομεν πρὸς αὐτούς, μεταβιβάζοντες ὅ τι ἂν μὴ καλῶς φαίνονται λέγειν ἡμῖν· πρὸς δὲ τὰς κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν ἐπιστήμας, ὅτι δυνάμενοι πρὸς ἀμφοτέρω διαπορῆσαι ῥᾶον ἐν ἐκάστοις κατοψόμεθα τὰληθές τε καὶ τὸ ψεῦδος· ἔτι δὲ πρὸς τὰ πρῶτα τῶν περὶ ἐκάστην ἐπιστήμην. ἐκ μὲν γὰρ τῶν οἰκείων τῶν κατὰ τὴν προτεθεῖσαν ἐπιστήμην ἀρχῶν ἀδύνατον εἰπεῖν τι περὶ αὐτῶν, ἐπειδὴ πρῶται αἱ ἀρχαὶ πάντων εἰσὶ, διὰ δὲ τῶν περὶ ἕκαστα ἐνδόξων ἀνάγκη περὶ αὐτῶν διελθεῖν. τοῦτο δ' ἴδιον ἢ μάλιστα οἰκείον τῆς διαλεκτικῆς ἐστίν· ἐξεταστικὴ γὰρ οὐσα πρὸς τὰς ἀπασῶν τῶν μεθόδων ἀρχᾶς ὁδὸν ἔχει.

¹⁶ Commentators sometimes worry that Aristotle states three uses, but gives four. The obvious solution to this is to see the fourth use as a subdivision of the third, and to take Aristotle as using 'philosophy' in a fairly loose sense in the passage. What is not permitted from the text is to see the

knowledge is that it enables one to work through the problems, but there is a secondary use, which is that it enables discussion of the first principles of each branch of understanding. These cannot be demonstrated from the (other) first principles that belong to the branch of understanding, because then they wouldn't be first principles; so the ability to discuss the first principles of a science must be different from that of demonstrating from the first principles of that science. The principle in question is dialectic, which involves some kind of mastery of the reputable opinions.

This passage has been widely discussed, and for good reason. We have already seen that the problem of first principles is deeply important for Aristotle's epistemology, and this passage promises to cast some light on it. If dialectic "holds the road" to the first principles, then, it's not unreasonable to think, dialectic is a solution to the problem of how we come to know, or have intellection of, these principles. Since dialectic involves argumentation, it might also be a way that we can, if not demonstrate, then at least argue for something, rather than another, being a first principle. And since Aristotle seems to argue about first principles, and not only by laying out inductive arguments, such a solution to the problem promises to help cast light on what Aristotle sees himself as doing in various philosophical works.

Those looking for an explanation of how first principles become known meet in this text a puzzle which is in a way even more pointed than the one they find in *APo II.19*. Induction and intellection at least seem like *prima facie* plausible accounts of how we come to know first principles. But in this text from the *Topics*, Aristotle emphasises that dialectic starts from *reputable opinions (endoxa)*. And indeed, the definition of a dialectical syllogism is a

search for first principles being effected by *diaporein*, since these two philosophical uses are clearly separated in the Greek.

sylllogism whose premises are reputable opinions. Now the problem with this is that Aristotle says that anything believed by most people, or most wise people, or the most reputable of the wise people, is a reputable opinion. But the things these people believe need not be true. A dialectic syllogism could thus be a syllogism with false premises. If we are looking to secure the most essential bases of knowledge, it seems like we ought to do better than this.

It might not be an overstatement to say that the question of whether we can find a solution to how first principles come to be known in this passage has been the most important question in research on Aristotelian dialectic in English since the 1980s. Two examples of solutions: Terence Irwin suggested that, in the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle came on the idea of isolating a subset of particularly reliable reputable opinions, forming a new dialectic that Irwin will call ‘strong dialectic’.¹⁷ Strong dialectic largely avoids the problem that a dialectical syllogism could have false premises. And Robert Bolton suggested that, in dialectic, the aim is to argue from the most reputable reputable opinions: that is, those believed by almost everyone, or the vast majority of experts, and claims that these are particularly close to perception, and so largely true.¹⁸ Each of these solutions is an attempt to show that dialectic could somehow provide an adequate justification of belief in first principles to ground something worthy of the name science.

In contrast to these positions, Robin Smith has argued, and I think rightly, that the passage ought not be taken as offering a solution to the problem of how we come to know first principles. He points out that the passage doesn’t actually say that dialectic provides

¹⁷ *Aristotle’s First Principles*: 19.

¹⁸ “The Epistemological Basis of Aristotle’s Dialectic”: 73–79; 97–98.

understanding of first principles.¹⁹ Indeed, to say that dialectic ‘has a road’ to first principles need not mean that it can, *on its own*, produce understanding of them, and a critical discussion of first principles may help intellection to grasp them, for example. Smith presses his scepticism about finding a solution here partly because he emphasises that dialectic was an social practice of refuting and being refuted in debates structured around questions and answers, and that reputable opinions are of course useful within this social practice, because interlocutors will likely accept them. And indeed, much of Aristotle’s advice in the *Topics*, including to use premises that merely resemble reputable opinions, and draw generalisations when an interlocutor might not be aware of the case in which the generalisation doesn’t hold, suggests that this emphasis is usually the right one to bring to the table.

A widely cited passage in the literature on dialectic as the method of Aristotelian philosophy is the opening of *EN VII*.²⁰ Here, Aristotle outlines a procedure in which one lays out the ‘*phainomena*’ – the appearances – which he sometimes refers to as the reputable opinions. He states here that the goal is to find an account that preserves these appearances, or at least as many and possible, and the most authoritative ones. The procedure he outlines sounds a lot like the procedure of reflective equilibrium, which is the dominant method in contemporary ethics, so the account offered is plausible as a procedure for carrying out ethics. Furthermore, there are important lexical connections between the opening of *EN VII* and the passage on the uses of dialectic: both mention working through puzzles, and the term ‘reputable opinions’

¹⁹ Smith translates the passage differently from how I do. The difference is that on Smith’s reading, the passage doesn’t say that dialectic *has a road to first principles* but that, dialectic is *critical of first principles*, and has a road. The point is that dialectic, being able to discuss anything, can discuss first principles. I find his arguments about the translation ultimately unconvincing, and so argue on different grounds here.

²⁰ E.g Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles*; Owen, “*Tithenai ta Phainomena*”; Kraut, “How to Justify Ethical Propositions: Aristotle’s Method”.

occurs in both places. Now, much of Aristotle's philosophical work certainly matches the description of method in *EN VII*. The discussion of weakness of will in *EN VII* itself does, and I believe much of the *Metaphysics* can be understood as a working through of the puzzles outlined in *B*.²¹ However, the capacity to work through puzzles is clearly separated in the Greek text from the use in searching for first principles. And the process of working through puzzles is never described in the *Topics*. That Aristotle states that dialectic is the way of searching for first principles does not, on its own, indicate that the first principles are to be found by working through puzzles, and, in many central passages about the goodness of things in the *EN*, one must forcibly impose the structure described in *EN VII* on the text in order to find it there. In particular, *EN I* and *EN X* are structured rather differently from the discussion of weakness of will in *EN VII*, without a clear laying out of puzzles.²² I am going to put aside this passage, and limit my investigation to whether Aristotle's argumentation about the goodness of things matches with his description of dialectic in the *Topics*.

I mention the debate about the scientific adequacy of dialectical examination of first principles partly to set it aside. I wish to make it clear that I am setting aside the issue of whether this text makes any bolder claim than that a dialectical examination of first principles can be very helpful. I am interested in this passage because, taken together with the other passages, it strongly suggests that, in any case, the primary kinds of argument of use for reaching, or at least testing candidates for, first principles are dialectical arguments. And I want to make some observations about what this means the arguments will be like. Whether or not the kinds of arguments I describe could form a satisfactory basis for understanding of

²¹ I have been convinced of this by Menn, *The Aim and Argument of Aristotle's Metaphysics*.

²² For a good discussion of passages in the *EN* where this method does not seem to be the one Aristotle is using, see Dorothea Frede's "The *endoxon* mystique"

the first principles of something worthy of the name ‘science’ is a question I would like very much to bracket.

Nevertheless, I would like to make some observations about what we should and shouldn’t expect dialectical arguments to be like. The first observation is that Smith’s highlighting the social practice of dialectic, while the right instinct for reading the vast majority of the *Topics*, is the wrong thing to highlight here. The problem is that Aristotle means to emphasise different things when he mentions dialectic. In some cases, he himself wants to emphasise dialectic as a social practice. For example Aristotle contrasts the dialectician and the philosopher in the following passage:

So far as choosing the argumentative strategy goes, the inquiry is the same for the philosopher and the dialectician; arranging them and asking them is peculiar to the dialectician; for all things of this sort are towards another person²³ (*Topics* 155b7-10)

Here, the dialecticians’ characteristic is that they are concerned with another person. When philosophy and dialectic are contrasted, it is the social aspect of dialectic that is in the forefront. In other passages, such as this one, to which we will return later, dialectic is again contrasted with philosophy. Here, a dialectic procedure is needed if we are interested in opinion or reputation, but philosophy must proceed in accordance with the truth:

²³ μέχρι μὲν οὖν τοῦ εὐρεῖν τὸν τόπον ὁμοίως τοῦ φιλοσόφου καὶ τοῦ διαλεκτικοῦ ἡ σκέψις, τὸ δ’ ἤδη ταῦτα τάττειν καὶ ἐρωτηματίζειν ἴδιον τοῦ διαλεκτικοῦ· πρὸς ἕτερον γὰρ πᾶν τὸ τοιοῦτον.

It is necessary to proceed in the case of philosophy following the truth about them, in the case of opinion, dialectically²⁴ (*Topics* 105b30-31)

But in 101a25–b5, Aristotle is not contrasting dialectic with philosophy. Indeed, he is describing a philosophical use of dialectic. This matters, because it permits us to imagine a dialectic appropriately modified to be compatible with philosophy, and in particular, it encourages us to think that the aspects that Aristotle particularly names as contrasts are, in this application of dialectic, to be suppressed. Dialectic applied in the search for first principles is quite reasonably taken as dialectic concerned with truth rather than refutation, and dialectic that one uses on one's own.

But we must be careful in making this move for two reasons. The first is that in the passage about dialectic's philosophical uses, Aristotle again emphasises that dialecticians argue from reputable opinions. How can this be reconciled with the idea of a dialectic concerned with the truth? The second reason is still more pressing. A promising way to understand dialectic is as an ability to do well in the social context of a dialectical debate. If we remove the social aspect of dialectic, we risk losing our grip on what dialectic is at all. I will take the second problem first.

In the *Topics*, Aristotle provides an analysis of the elements that make up the dialectical skill that allow us to give an account of what it is that does not relate to a particular practice. For he outlines the four *tools* of dialectic, different abilities that a dialectician will have that will enable them to do well. These tools are a large collection of premises harvested from what is

²⁴ Πρὸς μὲν οὖν φιλοσοφίαν κατ' ἀλήθειαν περὶ αὐτῶν πραγματευτέον, διαλεκτικῶς δὲ πρὸς δόξαν.

commonly or authoritatively believed, an ability to differentiate between meanings of words, an ability to group together similar things, and an ability to find points of difference between things. Furthermore, Aristotle spends the central six books of the *Topics* listing *topoi*, which are, roughly, schemes of arguments. Someone reading the *Topics*, then, is encouraged to develop the four tools, and either in addition to, or somehow as part of, this development, to internalise a large array of *topoi*. If we want a practice-neutral definition of dialectic, we can simply consider it to be a mastery of these five fields.

To say that Aristotle's argumentation is *dialectical*, then, would be to say that it is the sort of argument that could be assessed and produced by somebody who only possessed these skills. Importantly, argument within the special sciences is not like this. Assessing a proof in mathematics, optics, or astronomy requires different skills than the dialectical tools and a mastery of general *topoi*. It is also to say that we should be able to analyse the argumentation he uses in search of first principles, and in particular about the goodness of things, in the *EN* by seeing how it employs the *topoi* from the central books, and perhaps also the dialectical tools. If we can show that most arguments in the *EN* make use of the *topoi*, then we will have given good reason to think that the argumentation is dialectical in this sense. I will show in the next chapter that this is so.

But in the passage about the uses of the *Topics*, Aristotle again highlights the use of reputable opinions. He presents these as alternative starting points from the specialist understanding within each science. This raises two important questions about the argumentation we might expect to find in Aristotle. The first is: does this mean we can expect to find Aristotle arguing

from premises that he believes to be false, but reputable? The second is, *whose reputable opinions?*

The second question arises, because Aristotle sometimes relativises the term reputable to particular people. Something can be a reputable opinion *for* somebody. At other times, he seems to use it an unqualified way. Here is an example of each use:

[*From the definition of dialectical syllogisms*] Reputable opinions [*ta endoxa*] are those things that seem to be the case either to everybody, or most people, or to the wise, and either to all of these, or most, or the most well known and reputable. [*Topics* I.100b21-22]²⁵

The dialectical premise is a question which is reputable [*endoxos*] either to everyone or to most people or to the wise, and either to all of these or most of these, or to the especially well-known²⁶ [*Topics* I.104a8-9]

In the English translation, the lexical connection between these two texts is obscured by the fact that the Greek term for reputable opinions acts as an adjective in the one case, and a noun in the other. In Greek, it is possible to form nouns from adjectives simply by adding an article, e.g. to say “the skinny thing” you could simply say “the skinny”. In the first text, this is what is being done: Aristotle states what he means by “the reputable things”. In the second

²⁵ ἔνδοξα δὲ τὰ δοκοῦντα πᾶσιν ἢ τοῖς πλείστοις ἢ τοῖς σοφοῖς, καὶ τούτοις ἢ πᾶσιν ἢ τοῖς πλείστοις ἢ τοῖς μάλιστα γνωρίμοις καὶ ἐνδόξοις.

²⁶ ἔστι δὲ πρότασις διαλεκτικὴ ἐρώτησις ἐνδόξος ἢ πᾶσιν ἢ τοῖς πλείστοις ἢ τοῖς σοφοῖς, καὶ τούτοις ἢ πᾶσιν ἢ τοῖς πλείστοις ἢ τοῖς μάλιστα γνωρίμοις

text, the adjective is applied to a noun: a reputable question. We might well expect the meaning to be precisely the same in both cases. Here, however, it is not: a reputable question is reputable *to* someone, and that someone can vary from case to case, whereas this is not so for reputable opinions. A reputable opinion *for someone* would be, for example ‘something that appears to be the case to most of the wise for Socrates’, which would be silly. What has happened here? One possible answer is that it doesn’t really matter: in the first text, Aristotle is defining reputable opinions so as to tell the reader what premises a dialectical syllogism might have, and uses the term *reputable opinions* as a convenient shorthand; later, when he is giving a fuller discussion of dialectical premises, he is more expansive. But in both cases, the idea is the same: we should use premises that seem to be the case to most people, or all people, and so on. There’s no real tension, and we shouldn’t worry too much about it.

A problem with this is that the answerer in a dialectical debate is not instructed to test, in answering, whether something appears to be the case to one of the groups of people in Aristotle’s definition of a dialectical premise. A questioner in a dialectical exchange aims to ask questions that the answerer will accept, so this is important. Here is the essential text:

If therefore the thing laid down is straightforwardly a reputable opinion or a rejected opinion, then it is necessary to make comparisons about how things seem straightforwardly. If the thing set down is neither straightforwardly reputable or rejected but is so to the arguer, then it is necessary for him to affirm or not to affirm by choosing what seems or does not seem to him to be the case. And if the answerer defends somebody else's belief, it is obvious that it is looking towards this person's judgement that he must

affirm and deny each one. Therefore those attending to the beliefs of others, such as that the good and the bad are same, as Heraclitus said, do not concede that opposites cannot belong to the same thing at the same time, not because this does not seem to the case to them, but because it is necessary to say this according to Heraclitus.²⁷ [*Topics VIII.159b23-33*]

If we take this passage seriously, then both the definition of reputable opinions and the definition of dialectical premises were oversimplifications. In a particular dialectical exchange, the answerer acts as a representative of the thesis *as belonging to someone*, whoever it is that thinks the thesis is true. This somebody need not be somebody *else*: it may be the arguer. And this could be quite general, for a widely held belief; the answerer tries to say yes, whenever the thesis' owner would. If this is how we are to understand the claim that the premises of dialectical argument are reputable opinions, then we should find Aristotle arguing always from premises that people who hold the opposite view would accept. For example, in criticizing the theory of the forms, Aristotle should be arguing from what Plato, or perhaps supporters of the forms, more generally would accept.

This understanding of the importance of opinions being reputable puts the *interpersonal* notion of dialectic again in the forefront. Yet it is precisely this aspect of dialectic that Aristotle highlights when contrasting it with philosophy. And Aristotle offers, in the passage

²⁷ My translation from "The philosopher and the dialectician", modified. εἰ μὲν οὖν ἀπλῶς ἔνδοξον ἢ ἄδοξον τὸ κείμενον, πρὸς τὰ δοκοῦντα ἀπλῶς τὴν σύγκρισιν ποιητέον. εἰ δὲ μὴ ἀπλῶς ἔνδοξον ἢ ἄδοξον τὸ κείμενον ἀλλὰ τῷ ἀποκρινόμενῳ, πρὸς αὐτὸν τὸ δοκοῦν καὶ τὸ μὴ δοκοῦν κρίνοντα θετέον ἢ οὐ θετέον. ἂν δ' ἑτέρου δόξαν διαφυλάττη ὁ ἀποκρινόμενος, δῆλον ὅτι πρὸς τὴν ἐκείνου διάνοιαν ἀποβλέποντα θετέον ἕκαστα καὶ ἀρνητέον. διὸ καὶ οἱ κομίζοντες ἀλλοτριᾶς δόξας, οἷον ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν εἶναι ταῦτόν, καθάπερ Ἡράκλειτός φησιν, οὐ διδόασιν μὴ παρεῖναι ἅμα τῷ αὐτῷ τάναντία, οὐχ ὥς οὐ δοκοῦν αὐτοῖς τοῦτο, ἀλλ' ὅτι καθ' Ἡράκλειτον οὕτω λεκτέον.

on the uses of the *Topics*, the reputable opinions as an alternative to the things in accordance with the particular sciences, as though they were a body of, if not knowledge, then at least propositions worth drawing on. Finally, as we saw, philosophy is supposed to proceed in accordance with the *truth*, whereas the description of the dialectical answerer above is very much in accordance with opinion.

I am not aware of anywhere that Aristotle tells us whose reputable opinions we are drawing on, but I think we can construct a reasonable answer by considering whether, coming from the perspective of someone reading the *Topics* with a view to searching for first principles, we would fall on something that looks like a reasonable answer to this question. And I think that we do. In *Topics I.14*, Aristotle outlines the first of the dialectical tools, and this involves building a collection of premises. And here, he begins giving instructions, clearly aimed at the dialectician, rather than the philosopher, of how to collect premises. He says that premises are to be collected from the things believed by the wise and the many; from those skilled in particular arts; from the things that although not reputable opinions, are similar to them (and so easy to confuse with them); generalisations with little known exceptions; and so on. The collection is clearly meant to be a grab-all of things believed, with little discrimination as to the truth, and indeed as to whether they're really believed, or simply easy to mistake for something believed. But someone interested in first principles could well draw inspiration from this: they need to have a repository of things to argue from that is very general indeed, and building this up from things believed by people in a position to know about them seems like a good idea. It is certainly not possible to make sure one only accepts true things, but one could nevertheless make a good go of it, reading and talking widely to experts and knowledgeable people, and drawing on truly common sense, all the while applying what

critical capacities you could do to what they said. I cannot think of a better way to produce something like what is sometimes called *general knowledge*, and drawing on such a repository could well count as arguing *from reputable opinions*.

Two further considerations in favour of this reading. The first is that it matches Aristotle's argument for needing to draw on the respected opinions well. Aristotle explains the need to draw on reputable opinions from the fact that it's not possible to discuss first principles from the things proper to the science of which they are first principles. We can take it for granted, I think, that in many cases it is also not possible to discuss them from the things particular to *some other science*. And that suggests that there is no *specialised* field one can study up to learn about first principles. Understanding the point of collecting reputable opinions as to be well informed generally matches this argument well: you can't predict what you might need to be familiar with to discuss first principles, and so you should be familiar with a wide range of things. But the way to do that is by studying up what knowledgeable people think about these matters, rather than trying to develop scientific understanding of everything. The second consideration is that the text we cited above, in which Aristotle says philosophy should undertake "these things" with a view to the truth, and dialectic with a view to opinion, occurs in the middle of the chapter on collection of premises. It may well be that what Aristotle means by "these things" is the activities associated with collecting premises. Admittedly, there are other possible antecedents available. The passage comes immediately after a division of subjects into natural science, logic and ethics. Aristotle could perhaps mean that each of these branches is open to both dialectical and philosophical approaches. Or he could mean that the division itself is a dialectical one. However, the reading I am suggesting solves

a problem for Aristotle, and explains the relevance of the passage to the context better than the alternatives, but it is no sure thing.

If this is right, then we should expect Aristotle to draw on premises in the *EN* from a wide range of fields, and not only from premises that would somehow be proper to ethics. We shouldn't expect him either to argue from premises he probably thinks are false, but widely or authoritatively accepted; nor should he switch to arguing from premises his opponents would accept, whenever they can be plausibly given ownership of a thesis. It would further explain why Aristotle is willing, at times, to reject apparently reputable opinions out of hand.

A final observation, which is a partial return to the question that we put aside, of how dialectic can provide appropriate justification for accepting the foundations of something worthy of the name science. Aristotle's first principles are, after all, supposed to be extremely knowable *by nature*. It's not entirely clear what is meant by that, but it might be that it's the sort of thing that is possible to fully know and understand without demonstration. But if it is right to understand the *EN*, the *Metaphysics*, and the *Physics* as being, at least in large part, about first principles, then it seems that correctly identifying and grasping first principles sometimes comes only after much careful argumentation. In saying that this argumentation is dialectical, Aristotle is saying that it's the kind of argumentation that someone without any scientific understanding at all can assess and produce, therefore circumventing the problem that scientific understanding would be prior to itself.²⁸ That is, in locating the ability of

²⁸ This does not mean that just *anyone* could produce it or follow it: perhaps one's dialectical skills would have to be very sophisticated. Indeed, the first principles may be very difficult for us to grasp, which is why they can be simultaneously knowable by nature and not terribly knowable to us. On the other hand, if there are obscure theorems of a science which we can *only* grasp by first grasping the first principles, then these will be even less knowable to us.

searching for first principles in dialectic, Aristotle grounds it in a capacity which is not scientific. To put it another way: Aristotle might not have seen much need to explain how it is we grasp first principles, since he thought they were the sort of thing that was easy to grasp. He may rather have been troubled by how difficult it sometimes is to work out what the first principles are, and how some people seem to be better at doing this than others. But so long as they are graspable by someone whose only special ability is dialectic, they are easy enough to grasp to avoid a problematic regress of sciences. In this way, the *justificatory force* for knowing first principles will still come from the first principles being simple and easy to grasp, and *not* from the dialectical arguments; nevertheless, dialectical arguments help us to get a little closer to the first principles, so that we might grasp them.

To summarise: the dialectical aspect of Aristotle's understanding of his argumentative context is that, because the human good is the first principle of ethics, we should expect arguments about the human good to be dialectical. This means that they are likely to employ the *topoi* described in the *Topics*, and that the evaluation and formulation of these arguments should lie within the capacities of someone who has mastery of the four dialectical tools. Although it is true that the premises of these arguments will be reputable opinions, this is because the judicious collection of reputable opinions is the best way to build up something resembling general knowledge. We should thus assume that the reputable opinions Aristotle argues from are ones that he actually believes. We should not expect him to limit his selection of premises to premises his opponents accept, nor to see any need to argue from premises he himself does not. We need not think that dialectic provides a complete justification of first principles, as it may simply help us get into a position where we can see them clearly enough to grasp them directly.

The Limited Protreptic Aspect

The second aspect of Aristotle's answer to the central question is the *limited protreptic aspect*. The point of the *EN* is not only to argue for a position in ethics, but to present an argument that will help people with a minimally good character orient their lives towards the goodness of things. Unlike Socrates in the *Philebus*, Aristotle thought it was a waste of time trying to present arguments that would convince people of basically bad character, for, although they might come to the right conclusions, they wouldn't adjust their lives in accordance with them. For this reason, Aristotle was willing to offer arguments that the *Philebus*' Socrates would have avoided, namely, arguments that would be rejected by the vicious. The *EN* does, however, operate on a somewhat more restrictive requirement than the dialectical aspect imposes: premises must not only be drawn from the stock of collected general knowledge, but be the sort of thing likely to be recognised as true by anyone with an upbringing good enough that they will follow through on the conclusions of their moral reasoning. If Aristotle had written the *EN* for himself, he could have perhaps taken even more things for granted.

I would like to offer a short defence of the way Aristotle differs from Plato here, since the difference can make Aristotle seem rather complacent. Aristotle supposes he knows that his habituation was basically a good one, but how does he know this? Even if he could presuppose a level of familiarity with ethics gained from habituation on the part of his students, didn't he need to have some arguments to reassure himself that he wasn't, in fact, a deluded vicious person?

My defence of Aristotle here is not to say that this worry is entirely wrong, but rather, that it overstates how much Aristotle is presupposing. If I'm right about Aristotle's justification, his presupposition is that his readers' upbringing was such that they would be both willing and able to follow through on the results of their moral reflection. This presupposes a level of self-discipline and respect for reason.²⁹ Aristotle seems to think, further than this, that such people will agree on certain, general moral points. Where he presupposes something that we think might be rejected by a person willing and able to adapt their life to the conclusions of their philosophical reflections on ethics, we can, I think, consider this a failure to live up to his own standards of reasoning. The reason he can be reassured that his own habituation matches at least this standard is that he observes his own preparedness to put into practice the conclusions of his reflections on ethics.

This is a rather less exigent reading of the habituation requirement than other scholars have taken, as it is clear that Aristotle has in mind the kind of habituation that is a prerequisite for virtue, and this is usually taken to bring with it quite a substantive conception of the good life. Further, Aristotle famously says that he expects his students already to have the *that*, and that he will provide the *why*. What I am saying takes both these points in a minimal way. The habituation required for virtue is minimal: Aristotle seems to think, in these passages, that it's enough to be able to put the results of your reasoning into practice. And while Aristotle certainly presupposes some minimal agreement (e.g. honour is pursued for the sake of being

²⁹ It may be useful here to compare Bernard Williams' analysis of Kant's project in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*: 63-64. Williams argues that Kant presupposes that a person will accept practical deliberation as the most authoritative way to make decisions, but argues that, because people are more than merely rational agents, they may reject this as the correct way to make decisions. What Aristotle is presupposing is something akin to this very minimal level of commitment to consistency between reason and action.

rightly honoured; there is no right way to commit adultery), the *EN* contains arguments for many claims that seem to fall under the category of the ‘that’ (e.g the life of contemplation is better than the political life; temperance is a higher virtue than courage; the best kind of friendship is that of equals, and between good people).

In outlining the evidence that Aristotle’s argumentation is shaped by the idea of the *EN* as being a limited protreptic, I want to argue against another way of reading the evidence. On this reading, Aristotle does not think that it is even possible to adequately carry out an inquiry into ethical matters without a good habituation. Richard Kraut writes:

A person who has developed bad habits will not be able to acquire a satisfactory ethical theory. This is not a statement about the method to be used in ethical theory – proper habituation when one is a child is *not* part of the endoxic method – but it implies that certain people will never be able to use the method successfully. There will be something missing from what they bring to the method: they will not have all the starting-points on which a justified ethical theory rests.³⁰

In terms of what difference this makes to the arguments we would expect to find in the *EN*, the difference between Kraut’s view and mine is relatively small. But there are three reasons why I think it’s worth saying a few words against Kraut’s view here. The first is that, if Kraut is right, we need an explanation of why Aristotle thought habituation was required to gain the starting points. The explanation Kraut offers is the following:

³⁰ “How to Justify Ethical Propositions: Aristotle’s Method”: 93.

Aristotle must be assuming here that the materials with which the endoxic method works include how things appear *to oneself* – not merely how they seem to the many and to the wise. If someone has been brought up badly, and does not recognize this fact about himself, many propositions will strike him as being true, and will be included among the data of his ethical theory, even though they do not deserve serious consideration.³¹

Kraut has a rather different idea of Aristotle's method in the *EN*, according to which the reputable opinions operate as fallible data, and one tries to develop a theory that helps resolve contradictions between them, and takes into account as many of the most important as they can. Here, he nuances the account, adding to the reputable opinions the things one believes oneself. But Kraut's explanation here can be made to fit relatively well in the framework I suggested: one simply has to assume that the judicious selection of reputable opinions relevant to ethics requires a good habituation, and that the collection of reputable opinions will be corrupt if one doesn't have a good habituation. The problem with this account is that Aristotle doesn't seem to think that there is some subset of the reputable opinions relevant to finding the first principles of each particular science, and this is why a generalist knowledge is required. It's not clear why that should be any different for ethics.

If one finds Kraut's explanation inadequate, one might look for something more robust. McDowell, for example, writes about the problem of providing a grounding of ethics from a point of view 'external to ethics'. McDowell's thought seems to be that, since we cannot

³¹ Ibid. 93–94

build up an ethical theory from an understanding of the natural world entirely devoid of value, the starting points of our investigation within ethics must already be value-laden. And we must have some reason to think they are more or less true. Good habituation is the process by which we first become familiar with values.³² If this were right, then we would expect the argumentation in the *EN* quite generally to start from things that only people with good habituation would know. But much of it is not like this. For example, Aristotle endorses the argument that everything pursues pleasure, and so pleasure is the good. It's unclear why someone poorly habituated wouldn't accept this argument. It contains assumptions about value: that it makes sense to talk about value; that people have some capacity for recognising value. But it doesn't require any correct assumptions at the outset about *what is valuable*, and these are the sort of assumptions we would expect only the well-habituated to have. By arguing against Kraut's position, I undermine the justification for looking for an explanation for the epistemic necessity of habituation, and so any reason to expect the argumentation in the *EN* to be *limited* to arguments that people of good habituation could understand.

There is a further reason why this is important: because the justification for the presupposition of premises acquired through habituation has to do with the audience of the *EN*, it limits the claim that Aristotle presupposes that his audience knows what people with a good habituation know to the *EN*. If Aristotle thought that a good habituation was *required* to undertake a dialectical investigation into goodness, then we would expect this to shape his argumentation about goodness in the *EE* and the *Protrepticus* as well. If we take it that the human good is just the best thing that humans can achieve, and that the notion of goodness at play is the same here as in the *Metaphysics*, and the works on natural sciences, then we might

³² "Some Issues in Aristotle's Moral Psychology": 116-118.

suppose that these, too, can only be understood by someone with a good habituation. But a good habituation does not seem to be a requirement for following the argumentation of either the *Protrepticus* or the *Metaphysics*, and so a justification in terms of the audience of the *EN* is better than a justification in terms of what is required to gain knowledge of value.

There are two texts in Aristotle's *EN* that make the purpose of it as a limited protreptic clear.

The first is the following:

Each person discerns well the things they know, and is a good judge of these things. So it is one thing to be well educated about each thing, another to be well educated generally. Thus a young person is not a fitting audience for political studies. For they are inexperienced in the actions of life, and our arguments take these things as premises, and are about these things. Moreover the person inclined to follow their passions, will listen without purpose and to no end, since the goal is not knowing but doing. There is no difference if they are young in respect to age or youthful in regards to character; for it is not on account of time that they fall short, but through living in accordance with their passions and following each of them. For understanding is useless for these people, just as for those without self control. But to the people who form desires and act in accordance with

reason, understanding about these things will be highly beneficial.³³ (*EN* 1094b28-1095a13)

In this text, Aristotle outlines two separate reasons why young people will not listen well to ethics. The first is that experience is required for understanding about the “actions of life”, and that these are taken as premises in the arguments. One may read this passage as suggesting that only people who already know a lot about good and bad actions, who are already experienced at being *good people*, can follow the argument. But this is reading rather a lot into the text that it doesn’t actually say: rather, it says that people need to be *experienced at the matters of life*. Older people, bad or good, still generally have a stockpile of experiences to draw on that younger people do not: they have been in love, they have balanced a household budget, they have taken on positions of responsibility, and they are aware, at least, of some of the consequences of taking one kind of action or another.

The second reason where we find the requirement that a person be of good character: people who follow their passions have no use for understanding, as it is for people who lack self control. The reason is that the goal of studying ethics is *doing* rather than *knowing*. In other words, Aristotle’s purpose in the *EN* is not only to propound and defend a moral theory, but

³³ ἕκαστος δὲ κρίνει καλῶς ἃ γινώσκει, καὶ τούτων ἐστὶν ἀγαθὸς κριτὴς. καθ’ ἕκαστον μὲν ἄρα ὁ πεπαιδευμένος, ἀπλῶς δ’ ὁ περὶ πᾶν πεπαιδευμένος. διὸ τῆς πολιτικῆς οὐκ ἔστιν οἰκεῖος ἀκροατὴς ὁ νέος· ἄπειρος γὰρ τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον πράξεων, οἱ λόγοι δ’ ἐκ τούτων καὶ περὶ τούτων· ἔτι δὲ τοῖς πάθεσιν ἀκολουθητικὸς ὧν ματαίως ἀκούσεται καὶ ἀνωφελῶς, ἐπειδὴ τὸ τέλος ἐστὶν οὐ γνώσις ἀλλὰ πράξις. διαφέρει δ’ οὐδὲν νέος τὴν ἡλικίαν ἢ τὸ ἥθος νεαρός· οὐ γὰρ παρὰ τὸν χρόνον ἡ ἔλλειψις, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ κατὰ πάθος ζῆν καὶ διώκειν ἕκαστα. τοῖς γὰρ τοιούτοις ἀνόνητος ἡ γνώσις γίνεται, καθάπερ τοῖς ἀκρατέσιν· τοῖς δὲ κατὰ λόγον τὰς ὁρέξεις ποιουμένοις καὶ πράττουσι πολυωφελὲς ἂν εἴη τὸ περὶ τούτων εἰδέναι.

to get his audience to lead better lives, and he is only interested in writing for people who this will benefit. The second argument takes it for granted that knowledge is, in fact, possible for people without good characters – I suppose it's possible for the people with experience who follow their passions, or who, at least, lack self-control. Aristotle is simply not interested in the project of leading these people to understanding.

Thus it is well said that a person becomes just from doing just things, and moderate from doing moderate things: for from not doing these things nobody can hope to become good. But most people do not do these things, but hide beneath words and judge themselves to be doing philosophy and that they will become good in this way. They are doing something similar to those who are sick, who, although they listen to the doctors carefully, do nothing of what they prescribe. Thus just as the people who care for their bodies in this way will not become well, neither will those who thus apply philosophy to their soul.³⁴ (*EN 1105b10–19*)

In this text, Aristotle emphasises the importance of actually doing the things that ethical theory recommends. People who do ethical theory, but don't change the way they act, are like sick people who consult doctors, but don't follow their prescriptions. Importantly, the analogy with doctors strongly suggests that people who just do ethical theory without

³⁴ εὔ οὖν λέγεται ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ τὰ δίκαια πράττειν ὁ δίκαιος γίνεται καὶ ἐκ τοῦ τὰ σώφρονα ὁ σώφρων· ἐκ δὲ τοῦ μὴ πράττειν ταῦτα οὐδεὶς ἂν οὐδὲ μελλήσειε γίνεσθαι ἀγαθός. ἀλλ' οἱ πολλοὶ ταῦτα μὲν οὐ πράττουσιν, ἐπὶ δὲ τὸν λόγον καταφεύγοντες οἴονται φιλοσοφεῖν καὶ οὕτως ἔσεσθαι σπουδαῖοι, ὅμοιόν τι ποιοῦντες τοῖς κάμνουσιν, οἳ τῶν ἰατρῶν ἀκούουσι μὲν ἐπιμελῶς, ποιοῦσι δ' οὐδὲν τῶν προσταττομένων. ὥσπερ οὖν οὐδ' ἐκεῖνοι εὔ ἔξουσιν τὸ σῶμα οὕτω θεραπευόμενοι, οὐδ' οὗτοι τὴν ψυχὴν οὕτω φιλοσοφοῦντες.

practicing can get the right answers: the doctors are making the right prescriptions. What Aristotle is emphasising in this text, as in the last, is the uselessness of having the right answers, if you're not going to put them into practice. We see here a second statement of the same idea that would motivate him to direct the *EN* only to those with an upbringing good enough that they would follow their reason: writing a book like the *EN* for a broader audience would be a waste of time.

Kraut bases his claim that there is an epistemic reason by which Aristotle requires a good habituation in the following text:

For one must start from what is known, but this is twofold: for there is known for us and the straightforwardly known. Perhaps then in our case it is necessary to start from what is known to us. Thus it is necessary in order to listen adequately to have been brought up well in habits about the fine and the just and in general about political matters. For the starting point is the that, and if this is clear at the beginning, there is no additional need for the why. Such a person has, or will easily grasp, the starting points.³⁵ (*Nic Eth. 1095b1-8*)

The reason Kraut reads this text as he does is because he takes the contrast between “what is known to us” and “what is straightforwardly known” to be a contrast between two groups of propositions that are the same for all people. That is, “what is known to us”, is roughly, “what

³⁵ ἀρκτέον μὲν γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν γνωρίμων, ταῦτα δὲ διττῶς· τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἡμῖν τὰ δ' ἀπλῶς. ἴσως οὖν ἡμῖν γε ἀρκτέον ἀπὸ τῶν ἡμῖν γνωρίμων. διὸ δεῖ τοῖς ἔθεσιν ἡχθαι καλῶς τὸν περὶ καλῶν καὶ δικαίων καὶ ὅλως τῶν πολιτικῶν ἀκουσόμενον ἱκανῶς. ἀρχὴ γὰρ τὸ ὅτι, καὶ εἰ τοῦτο φαίνοιτο ἀρκούντως, οὐδὲν προσδεήσει τοῦ διότι ὁ δὲ τοιοῦτος ἔχει ἢ λάβοι ἂν ἀρχὰς ῥαδίως.

is known to human beings”. This reading is suggested strongly by the text in the *APo*, where Aristotle says that what is known to “us” is what is close to sense perception.³⁶ However, as we saw earlier, in the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle states that the purpose of the investigation is to make what is known by nature known to us.³⁷ This suggests that what is known to “us” is what is known to the people undertaking the investigation, and varies depending on what the investigation is. If this is right, then Aristotle is simply outlining where his investigation is starting from, and what prior knowledge he expects people to have in order to undertake the investigation. He has already, by the time we reach this text, explained why it’s a waste of time to try to read ethics if you are brought up badly, and he emphasises that he will be presupposing what people will know if they have been brought up well. I will not argue more extensively here that this is the way the text *must* be read: it is enough for my purposes to observe that in other texts, understanding seems to be possible for people who have been brought up badly, and this text can be read in a way that makes it consistent with them, which is a clear advantage.

It’s worth mentioning how this reading can make sense of the inferences indicated in the text. How does the fact that we must start from what is better known to us *justify* the claim that a good habituation is necessary to listen well? Because, we’ve already established that the group carrying out the inquiry are people who have been brought up well in this way, so we may as well start from what they can reasonably be expected to know. How does the fact that the ‘that’ is enough justify this further? It explains why the prerequisite of habituation is sufficient, rather than explaining why it is necessary: after all, the emphasis is as much on the point that one does not need the *why* before the investigation begins, as that one needs the

³⁶ *APo* 71a34-b5

³⁷ *Met.* 1029b3-12

that, and, to make the point again, people without a good habituation may grasp the *that*, but it will not do them any good. Readers who wish to take this passage differently need to explain this apparent shift in position.

Aristotle's protreptic aim means that he can use strategies of argument that will only be effective towards someone who already has some moral knowledge. We should not be surprised to find among the strategies he uses in investigating the goodness of things many that involve an appeal to some claim about the goodness of things. We should also not be surprised to find Aristotle primarily focussing on questions of comparison: he may suppose that people willing to put in place the results of their reasoning will already broadly agree on what things have some claim to be worth pursuing, and think that the primary difficulty lies in determining which is the best.

The Ranking Aspect

In this section I will outline a final aspect of Aristotle's answer to the central question, which I call the ranking aspect. The ranking aspect is that the only piece of knowledge about the goodness of things that matters is the correct identification of the highest good. It doesn't matter if the second-highest good has been correctly or incorrectly identified; it doesn't even matter if the second-highest good is not a good at all. We will see in this chapter that this leads Aristotle to adopt an overall approach that I call *search and rank*: he tries to identify everything that might well be a good, and then tries to determine which of these is the best. For this reason, his argument strategies almost exclusively achieve one of two aims: determining of two things which is the better, or giving a reason to think that something is a

good. A negligible number of argument schemes allow him to show that something apparently good is not actually good.

That the *EN* involves a search for the highest good is set down at the outset. The *EN* begins with the following indication of the highest good:

Every art and every discipline, and similarly every action and decision, seems to pursue some good: thus it is said correctly that the good is what everything pursues.³⁸ (*EN 1094a1-2*)

And, shortly later, while still laying out the purpose of the investigation, Aristotle emphasises how useful it would be to know the correct identity of the highest good:

And if there is some goal of actions which we want because of itself, and we want the others because of this, and we do not choose everything because of something else (for thus it would go on until infinity, so that desire would be empty and idle), then it is obvious that this would be the good and the best. Now would not understanding of this hold great importance for life, and wouldn't we, having a target like archers, be more likely to meet what needed to be done?³⁹ (*EN 1094a18-24*)

³⁸ πᾶσα τέχνη καὶ πᾶσα μέθοδος, ὁμοίως δὲ πρᾶξις τε καὶ προαίρεσις, ἀγαθοῦ τινὸς ἐφίεσθαι δοκεῖ: διὸ καλῶς ἀπεφάναντο τὰγαθόν, οὗ πάντ' ἐφίεται.

³⁹ Εἰ δὴ τι τέλος ἐστὶ τῶν πρακτῶν ὃ δι' αὐτὸ βουλόμεθα, τᾶλλα δὲ διὰ τοῦτο, καὶ μὴ πάντα δι' ἕτερον αἰρούμεθα (πρόεισι γὰρ οὕτω γ' εἰς ἄπειρον, ὥστ' εἶναι κενὴν καὶ ματαίαν τὴν ὄρεξιν), δῆλον ὡς τοῦτ' ἂν εἴη τὰγαθὸν καὶ τὸ ἄριστον. ἄρ' οὖν καὶ πρὸς τὸν βίον ἡ γνώσις αὐτοῦ μεγάλην ἔχει ῥοπήν, καὶ καθάπερ τοξόται σκοπὸν ἔχοντες μᾶλλον ἂν τυγχάνοιμεν τοῦ δέοντος;

In each passage, Aristotle talks as though we need to identify some good thing which we will do everything for the sake of. This is an importantly different view than the one which is the default view in contemporary ethics. According to this view, the point of studying the goodness of things is to work out precisely which things have value, and how much, and how to calculate the value of combinations. We need to know these things, the thought goes, because we will need to choose between good things in different quantities. It's not enough to know that a game of chess is better than a day at the beach; we also need to be able to work out whether three days at the beach are better than two games of chess, or two days at the beach and a night at the movies. If we only knew which thing was the best, we would find ourselves frequently lacking the knowledge required to make decisions.

Aristotle's view is rather different. The highest good, for Aristotle, will become a structuring principle of our lives, and everything we want, we want for its sake. Now this might *sound like* value monism. For example, if I am a hedonist, then I think everything is done for the sake of pleasure. I have a relatively easy time making decisions: I work out what is the best choice if I want to maximise pleasure across my lifetime, and I pursue that. But to be a hedonist, I need to be convinced not only that pleasure is good, nor even that pleasure is the best thing, but also that nothing else is good. For Aristotle, the highest good plays the role that pleasure does for the hedonist, even though there are other goods.

In the *EE*, we find Aristotle emphasising the role the highest good plays as well:

Since there is some limit even for the doctor, to which he refers when discerning what is healthy for the body and what is not, and with respect to

which he determines up to what point it is necessary to rightly do each healthy thing (if it is done more or less, it is no longer healthy); so also in the case of excellence in actions and choices of what is by nature good and what is not laudable, it is necessary that there be some limit for habit and choice and avoidance and use of wealth and poverty, and of good luck. In these matters we said earlier that this is as reason dictates. This is just as if someone said in the case of diet, that it should be in accordance with the medical art and its reason. While this is true, it is not clear. It is necessary, then, just as in the case of other things to live in relation to the leader, and in relation to the disposition in actuality of the leading, just as a slave towards the master and each thing towards its own fitting commanding element. Since humans are naturally composed of a leading element and a led element, it is necessary that each person live in relation to their leading element. But this is ambiguous; for the art of health is a leader in one way and health in another. But this is for the sake of that. Thus he should live in accordance with the theoretical component. For god does not lead by commanding, but is that for the sake of which reason commands. That for the sake of which is twofold (we have differentiated this elsewhere), since he lacks nothing. *Thus whatever choice or acquisition of natural goods, either bodily goods, or possessions, or friends, or other goods, will especially further the contemplation of god, this is the best, and this is the finest limit.* Whatever, either through lacking or exceeding, prevents the care and contemplation of god, this is bad. For this is so for the soul, and this is the best limit of the soul, when it perceives as little as possible that of

the irrational part of the soul⁴⁰, as such. Now let this be the limit of the good person, and the aim of things good without qualification.⁴¹ (*EE* 1249a21–b26)

Because the highest good takes such a dominating role in decision making, it will determine the goodness of anything else. If contemplation is the highest good, it doesn't much matter if friendship is the second highest, since this will make no difference to how much friendship we should pursue. We should pursue exactly as much friendship as will best enable us to contemplate. This view limits the damage of getting the identity of the second-highest good wrong, say, thinking that contemplation is the best, and after that power. For, if we take over Aristotle's view of how practical reasoning works, the recommendation will be the same: we

⁴⁰ This phrase is difficult to construe. "The irrational part of the mind" is in the genitive, and could just as well be the object of perceiving. Rackham takes it this way, with the idea that Aristotle means that the goal of the mind is to take as little notice as possible of its irrational part (and so leave itself fully focussed, presumably, on contemplation of god). Woolf also takes it the genitive as the object of to perceive, but translates "it is the best limit for the soul when one is least aware of the irrational part as such". Woolf's translation seems ambiguous to me – either Woolf's idea is the same as Rackham's, or Woolf's idea is that it means something like "suppose we ignore the irrational part of the soul, then the goal of the soul is contemplation of god." Another option would be to take perceiving as little possible to be the goal of the irrational part of the mind, the idea being that it should be silenced to provide as little distraction as possible.

⁴¹ ἐπεὶ δ' ἐστὶ τις ὁρος καὶ τῷ ἱατρῷ, πρὸς ὃν ἀναφέρων κρίνει τὸ ὑγιεινὸν σώματι καὶ μή, καὶ πρὸς ὃν μέχρι ποσοῦ ποιητέον ἕκαστον καὶ εὖ ὑγιαίνειν, εἰ δὲ ἔλαττον ἢ πλεον, οὐκέτι· οὕτω καὶ τῷ σπουδαίῳ περὶ τὰς πράξεις καὶ αἰρέσεις τῶν φύσει μὲν ἀγαθῶν οὐκ ἐπαινετῶν δὲ δεῖ τινα εἶναι ὅρον καὶ τῆς ἕξεως καὶ τῆς αἰρέσεως καὶ περὶ φυγῆς καὶ περὶ χρημάτων πλήθους καὶ ὀλιγότητος καὶ τῶν εὐτυχημάτων. ἐν μὲν οὖν τοῖς πρότερον ἐλέχθη τὸ ὡς ὁ λόγος· τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶν ὥσπερ ἂν εἴ τις ἐν τοῖς περὶ τὴν τροφήν εἴπειεν ὡς ἡ ἱατρικὴ καὶ ὁ λόγος ταύτης. τοῦτο δ' ἀληθὲς μὲν, οὐ σαφὲς δέ. δεῖ δὴ ὥσπερ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις πρὸς τὸ ἄρχον ζῆν, καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἕξιν κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τὴν τοῦ ἄρχοντος, οἷον δοῦλον πρὸς δεσπότου καὶ ἕκαστον πρὸς τὴν ἐκάστου καθήκουσαν ἀρχήν. ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ ἄνθρωπος φύσει συνέστηκεν ἐξ ἄρχοντος καὶ ἀρχομένου, καὶ ἕκαστον ἂν δέοι πρὸς τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἀρχήν ζῆν· αὕτη δὲ διττή· ἄλλως γὰρ ἡ ἱατρικὴ ἀρχὴ καὶ ἄλλως ἡ ὑγίεια· ταύτης δὲ ἕνεκα ἐκείνη· οὕτω δ' ἔχει κατὰ τὸ θεωρητικόν. οὐ γὰρ ἐπιτακτικῶς ἄρχων ὁ θεός, ἀλλ' οὗ ἕνεκα ἡ φρόνησις ἐπιτάττει· διττὸν δὲ τὸ οὗ ἕνεκα (διώρισται δ' ἐν ἄλλοις) ἐπεὶ κείνός γε οὐθενὸς δεῖται. ἥτις οὖν αἵρεσις καὶ κτῆσις τῶν φύσει ἀγαθῶν ποιήσει μάλιστα τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ θεωρίαν, ἢ σώματος ἢ χρημάτων ἢ φίλων ἢ τῶν ἄλλων ἀγαθῶν, αὕτη ἀρίστη, καὶ οὗτος ὁ ὅρος κάλλιστος· ἥτις δ' ἢ δι' ἑνδειαν ἢ δι' ὑπερβολὴν κωλύει τὸν θεὸν θεραπεύειν καὶ θεωρεῖν, αὕτη δὲ φαύλη. ἔχει δὲ τοῦτο τῇ ψυχῇ, καὶ οὗτος τῆς ψυχῆς ὅρος ἄριστος, ὅταν ἥκιστα αἰσθάνεσθαι τοῦ ἀλόγου μέρους τῆς ψυχῆς, ἢ τοιοῦτον. τις μὲν οὖν ὅρος τῆς καλοκάγαθίας, καὶ τίς ὁ σκοπὸς τῶν ἀπλῶς ἀγαθῶν, ἔστω εἰρημένον·

should pursue as much contemplation as possible, and precisely as much power as will allow us to realise the maximum amount of contemplation.

There is, however, still room for practical importance of the lesser goods: when it is not possible to contemplate, it will be of significance whether one chooses the life of pure pleasure or the life of political virtue. However, if we know what the highest good is, we may be able to determine the next highest goods from there. Although the identity of the highest good is a first principle for Aristotle, it's not clear that this is the case for the identity of the second highest good.⁴²

There is a serious puzzle here, which I will mention and then set aside, as to why Aristotle gives such an overriding role to the highest good. One possible solution would be that he thought the highest good was the only thing good on its own, and that every other good was only good as a means to, or partially constitutive of, the highest good.⁴³ The problem with this is that Aristotle recognises other things that are worth pursuing for their own sake, such as pleasure and the virtues.⁴⁴ And the problem this raises is: wouldn't there be some cases where we might choose some quantity of pleasure over some quantity of contemplation? For example, mightn't we do better to spend an hour booking a six-month holiday, rather than spending this hour contemplating, even if we won't recover the contemplation on the holiday,

⁴² See Gabriel Richardson Lear, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good*

⁴³ Sarah Broadie discusses this possibility in "On the idea of the *summum bonum*": 139–141. Broadie considers another possibility, which is that possession of the highest good is necessary for the enjoyment of other goods, which is supposed to explain its supremacy. The idea must be something like trading the highest good in for any amount of another good wouldn't do, because you wouldn't be able to enjoy the other good. But this assumes a situation where you either possess the highest good or you don't, not one in which you possess some quantity of the highest good. It's not clear how to make Broadie's suggestion work if the highest good is something you can possess more and less of.

⁴⁴ EN 1097b3–4

even if the holiday results in no gain in contemplation? One must do more than simply show that contemplation is better than pleasure, or that contemplation is more pleasant than a holiday, to show that this will always be a bad trade-off.⁴⁵

Since Aristotle gives such importance to the highest good, it will be no surprise in the next chapter that we find Aristotle applying a strategy I call *search and rank*. This strategy involves, first, finding all the things that there is some good reason to think might be goods, and, second, assuming they are all good and applying a series of tests to compare them in order to identify the highest good. This strategy requires two kinds of arguments: first, arguments that give some reason for assuming that something is a good thing, and, second, arguments that allow a comparison. Importantly, it does not require any arguments that show that something we take to be good actually isn't. If the comparative tests are good enough, we might reasonably assume that a merely apparent good won't turn up in first place, so it won't matter that we didn't explicitly try to filter them out from our ranking. The method offers little reassurance that we have correctly identified only the good things as good, and only offers a very incomplete ranking. It therefore would not be an appropriate method to use if one thought one should take into account every good and bad thing in making decisions, weighing them against each other based on their relative goodness badness. It is, however, perfectly reasonable as an approach to identifying the highest good.

Conclusion

⁴⁵ It's not enough to solve this problem to argue that the highest good is the only thing that is never done for the sake of anything else. For even if pleasure is sometimes pursued for the sake of contemplation, it may be that it does not make sense to pursue a very large amount of pleasure for the sake of a small amount of contemplation, as the pleasure is better.

Aristotle then understands the argumentative context of the *EN* as having three aspects: the dialectical, the limited protreptic, and the ranking aspect. To put it simply, Aristotle thought that the only people who could benefit from philosophical reflection about the goodness of things already knew something about them. Because the highest good plays the role of first principle, there is no specialised skill for investigating the goodness of things; rather, the skill required is the same as for the first principles of each branch of understanding, and that is dialectic. Finally, since the investigation is undertaken for practical purposes, and that the identity of the highest good is of vastly greater practical importance than that of the other goods, search and rank is a strategy that it makes good sense to apply. We will see in the next chapter how this shapes his selection of argument schemes.

~Aristotle~

The *Topics* and the *EN*

In the last chapter, I argued that Aristotle understood the argumentative context of investigations into the good as dialectical, protreptic (but in a way different from Plato's Socrates) and focused on rank and search. In this chapter I explore an upshot of these claims, namely, that there is a close relationship between the argumentative strategies in investigating the good in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and those described in *Topics III.1–4*. In the first line of investigation I confirm this idea by showing how, at a key moment in the *EN* (namely, the comparison of lives at *EN XI177a17-8a8*), Aristotle draws extensively on argumentation schemes from the *Topics*. In the second line of investigation, I bolster my case that Aristotle saw the argumentative context of the good differently from Plato, by showing that an argument used frequently by Plato's *Socrates* does not appear in the *Topics*. And in a third line investigation, I show that we may exploit this connection between the *Topics* and the *EN* to show that Aristotle's overall strategy in the *EN* is rank-and-search.

First, a note on the limitations of this investigation: I have only examined the arguments in the *EN* that seek to show that something is good, not good, or that one thing is better than another. Many arguments in the *EN* are about other topics, for example, what friendship is, or whether something is a virtue. Although I suspect these arguments also come from the *Topics*, they will not in general come from *Topics III.1–4*, and the work to locate the schemes employed by these arguments elsewhere in the *Topics* has not yet been carried out. It may also be that some of the arguments come more directly from the tools of dialectic – finding similarities and differences, and distinguishing meanings of words. Insofar as there are arguments in the *EN* that are not about first principles, however, I am not committed to the claim that they are dialectical.

The results of my study allow us to see that the arguments about the goodness of things in the *EN* are taken from the *Topics*. But this is not enough to show that *Topics III.1–4* describes the strategies Aristotle sees as acceptable for use in studying the goodness of things. For the *Topics* could be Aristotle's collection of all argument schemes used by his contemporaries in studying the goodness of things. In this case, it would be impossible to infer claims about what is *distinctive* about Aristotle's argumentation from an analysis of the *Topics*. I show that this is unlikely, since a key Socratic argument scheme is missing from the collection: the argument scheme that allows us to infer that something is not good, from the claim that it sometimes harms. If Aristotle is not including schemes from other philosophical schools in the *Topics*, then we can indeed use the *Topics* to understand what is distinctive about Aristotle's argumentation.

Nevertheless, I argue that, in line with how we understood the dialectical aspect of Aristotle's answer, there are some *topoi* in *Topics III.1–4* which are unlikely to have been useful for philosophy, and give several examples of *topoi* I believe are included for their usefulness in dialectical debate. These *topoi* are not used in the *EN*.

From this we can conclude that Aristotle's understanding of the argumentative context has a powerful impact on the argumentation we find in the *EN*. The argumentation is of a sort that he believed could be evaluated by someone with a generalist skill of reasoning: dialectic. And it is shaped by Aristotle's use of the rank and search strategy, which was justified by the focus of Aristotle's investigation on identifying the highest good. If we want to fully understand why Aristotle's theory of the good differs from that espoused by Socrates in Plato's dialogues, we must take into account this difference in understanding of the goals and limits of argumentation.

Section One: Topoi in the Comparison of Lives

In this section, I examine *EN X.1177a17–8a8*. This section is extremely dense in arguments for the claim that the life of contemplation is better than the life of political virtue, and so is a good test case for the claim that argumentation about what is good and what is not in the *EN* is dialectical in the sense outlined in the previous chapter. We do indeed find that the vast majority of arguments in this text instantiate *topoi* from *Topics III.1–4*.

The first section of our text runs as follows:

That [the best element in us] is the theoretical component, we have already said. This would seem to agree with both what we said earlier and the truth. For this activity is the best (for intellect is the best of the things in us, and of the things known, those things about which intellect knows). Furthermore it is the most continuous. For we can contemplate more continuously than we can do anything else.¹ (*EN 1177a17-22*)

This passage begins with an introduction to the section, and the first argument for the superiority of the life of contemplation: an appeal to the *continuity* of contemplation: contemplation is that which we can do most continuously. This is one of only two arguments to be found in this section which do not instantiate any *topoi* from *Topics III.1–4*. In the next section, we find several arguments, all of which instantiate these *topoi*:

We believe that pleasure must be mixed in with happiness. And it is widely agreed that of the activities in accordance with virtue, that in accordance with wisdom is most pleasant. At any rate, philosophy holds pleasures which are remarkable both for their purity and stability, and it is likely that those who [already] know will lead their lives more pleasantly than those who are still searching.² (*EN 1177a22-25*)

¹ ὅτι δ' ἐστὶ θεωρητικὴ, εἴρηται. ὁμολογούμενον δὲ τοῦτ' ἂν δόξειεν εἶναι καὶ τοῖς πρότερον καὶ τῷ ἀληθεῖ. κρατίστη τε γὰρ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐνέργεια (καὶ γὰρ ὁ νοῦς τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ τῶν γνωστῶν, περὶ ἃ ὁ νοῦς)· ἔτι δὲ συνεχεστάτη· θεωρεῖν [τε] γὰρ δυνάμεθα συνεχῶς μᾶλλον ἢ πράττειν ὅτιοῦν.

² οἴομεθά τε δεῖν ἡδονὴν παραμεμῖχθαι τῇ εὐδαιμονίᾳ, ἡδίστη δὲ τῶν κατ' ἀρετὴν ἐνεργειῶν ἡ κατὰ τὴν σοφίαν ὁμολογουμένως ἐστίν· δοκεῖ γοῦν ἡ φιλοσοφία θαυμαστὰς ἡδονὰς ἔχειν καθαριότητι καὶ τῷ βεβαίῳ, εὖλογον δὲ τοῖς εἰδόσι τῶν ζητούντων ἡδῖω τὴν διαγωγὴν εἶναι.

This paragraph contains three arguments: the theoretical life is good, because it is mixed with pleasure, because philosophy involves pleasures. Two properties of these pleasures are mentioned that highlight that they are particularly good: they are steady, and they are unmixed.

That pleasure must be mixed in with happiness in order for it to be the best state is an instantiation of the following *topos*:

The things with pleasure [are better than] those without pleasure³ (*Topics* 117a24-25)

We'd expect, then, the highest good to have pleasure associated with it. Otherwise, it might be worse than something pleasant. The two properties of the pleasures are also lightning fast applications of our *topoi*. The second property, steadiness, is mentioned directly in the following *topos*:

First, then, that which is longer lasting and steadier is more choiceworthy than that which is less so⁴ (*Topics* 116a13-14)

The second property, purity, is not directly mentioned in any of the *topoi* in *Topics* III.1–4. However, the idea of the pleasures of philosophy being particularly pure has a clear precedent in Plato's *Philebus*, where the idea is that the pleasure is not mixed in with pain:

³ καὶ ταῦτα μεθ' ἡδονῆς μᾶλλον ἢ ἄνευ ἡδονῆς.

⁴ Πρῶτον μὲν οὖν τὸ πολυχρονιώτερον ἢ βεβαιώτερον αἰρετώτερον τοῦ ἥττον τοιούτου.

These pleasures of learning are unmixed with pains⁵ (*Philebus* 52b)

The term ‘unmixed’ is not the same as ‘pure’, though the idea is surely the same. And in any case, a few lines earlier Plato uses the term ‘pure’ to describe the painless pleasures of perception.⁶ Since it is likely that ‘unmixed’ means ‘unmixed with pain’, we find the application of another *topos*:

And those that are with freedom from pain are better than those that are with pain⁷ (*Topics* 117a24)

The next section of the argument for the superiority of the life of contemplation over the life of action is similarly an application of one of our *topoi*:

And self-sufficiency is said most especially of the theoretical component. For the wise person and just person and the others need the necessities of life, but even when these are sufficiently provided, the just person will still need people towards whom and with who she can be just, and similarly for the temperate person and the brave person and each of the others, but the wise person is able to contemplate on her own, and the more so the wiser she is. Perhaps she can contemplate better when she has some people

⁵ Ταύτας τοίνυν τὰς τῶν μαθημάτων ἡδονὰς ἀμείκτους τε εἶναι λύπαις

⁶ ἡδεΐας καθαρὰς λυπῶν, *Philebus* 52b7.

⁷ καὶ ταῦτ' ἀλυπίας ἢ μετὰ λύπης

working alongside her, but she is nonetheless the most self-sufficient.⁸ (*EN* 1177a27-b1)

‘Self-sufficiency’ [*autarkeia*] is not a term that comes up in the *Topics*. Nevertheless, the concern with self-sufficiency matches the following *topos* closely:

And that which is at each moment (καιρός) or in most advantageous is more useful; for example justice and temperance are more useful than courage.
For the first two are always, the third sometimes, useful⁹ (*Top* 117a35-6)

The *topos* is strictly speaking phrased in terms of ‘usefulness’, but the *topoi* in *Topics III.1-4* are generally aimed at showing what is better, or more choiceworthy, than what, so we should not put too much weight on the occurrence of the word ‘useful’ here – it is likely standing in for ‘good’ or ‘choiceworthy’. The point of this *topos* is that some things are only useful under certain conditions, and the more widely useful something is, the better it is. That is at least very closely related to the idea of self-sufficiency. In the particular application we see above, we find that wisdom is useful (in the sense that being wise benefits the wise person) under a wider range of circumstances than even justice; for justice needs other people to be around, whereas contemplation is possible without anyone else present. To be

⁸ ἢ τε λεγομένη αὐτάρκεια περὶ τὴν θεωρητικὴν μάλιστ' ἂν εἴη· τῶν μὲν γὰρ πρὸς τὸ ζῆν ἀναγκαίων καὶ σοφὸς καὶ δίκαιος καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ δέονται, τοῖς δὲ τοιούτοις ἱκανῶς κεχορηγημένων ὁ μὲν δίκαιος δεῖται πρὸς οὓς δικαιοπραγήσει καὶ μεθ' ὧν, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ὁ σώφρων καὶ ὁ ἀνδρεῖος καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἕκαστος, ὁ δὲ σοφὸς καὶ καθ' αὐτὸν ὧν δύναται θεωρεῖν, καὶ ὅσω ἂν σοφώτερος ᾖ, μᾶλλον· βέλτιον δ' ἴσως συνεργοὺς ἔχων, ἀλλ' ὅμως αὐταρκέστατος.

⁹ Καὶ ὁ ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ ἢ ἐν τοῖς πλείστοις χρησιμώτερον, οἷον δικαιοσύνη καὶ σωφροσύνη ἀνδρείας· αἱ μὲν γὰρ αἰεὶ, ἡ δὲ ποτὲ χρησίμη.

self-sufficient is just to be useable under almost any circumstances. And so the argument can be understood in accordance with the *topos* we mentioned.

We turn now to the next section of our passage:

And it seems that only this is loved out for its own sake: for nothing arises beyond contemplation from it, but from practical matters either more or less seem to come about beyond the practice.¹⁰ (*Nic Eth.* 1177b1-3)

The argument here is that only contemplation is carried out ‘for its own sake’, while a practical life is carried out for the sake of something else.¹¹ This is a straightforward application of the following *topos*:

And that which is choiceworthy because of itself is more choiceworthy than that which is choiceworthy because of something else¹² (*Topics* 116a29-30)

The argument in the next text section bears a somewhat closer analysis:

And happiness seems to be in leisure; for we are without leisure in order to have leisure, and we wage war in order to live in peace. But the activity of

¹⁰ δόξαι τ' ἂν αὐτὴ μόνη δι' αὐτὴν ἀγαπᾶσθαι· οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀπ' αὐτῆς γίνεται παρὰ τὸ θεωρῆσαι, ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν πρακτικῶν ἢ πλεῖον ἢ ἔλαττον περιποιούμεθα παρὰ τὴν πρᾶξιν.

¹¹ This is not to mention the rather curious little sub-argument, which is that there is simply nothing further than contemplation that results from it. I do not see now how to reconcile this with the idea that contemplation is present: perhaps the idea is something like that pleasure is a by-product of contemplation.

¹² Καὶ τὸ δι' αὐτὸ αἰρετὸν τοῦ δι' ἕτερον αἰρετοῦ αἰρετώτερον

the practical virtues is in war and politics, and the activities relating to these seem to be hard work. This is entirely so in wars (for nobody would choose war for the sake of war, nor prepare for war. For somebody would seem entirely bloodthirsty, if they turned their friends into enemies, in order that battles and slaughter might arise.) There is also hard work in political matters, and political activity brings about beyond itself power and honour or happiness for the politicians and the citizens, which is different from political [activity], and which we clearly seek as something different.¹³ (*Nic Eth.* 1177b3-15)

The final two sentences give another application of the previous *topos*. But there are two further *topoi* at play here. First, Aristotle argues that leisure is the best state: war and exertion are less good, because they are for the sake of leisure and peace. This is an application of the following *topos*:

And the end seems to be more choiceworthy than the things directed at the end¹⁴ (*Topics* 116b23-24)

We wage war *in order to* live in peace, and we exert ourselves *in order to* have leisure. This means that leisure and peace are the ends of exertion and war, and thus, by the above *topos*,

¹³ δοκεῖ τε ἡ εὐδαιμονία ἐν τῇ σχολῇ εἶναι· ἀσχολούμεθα γὰρ ἵνα σχολάζωμεν, καὶ πολεμοῦμεν ἵνα εἰρήνην ἄγωμεν. τῶν μὲν οὖν πρακτικῶν ἀρετῶν ἐν τοῖς πολιτικοῖς ἢ ἐν τοῖς πολεμικοῖς ἡ ἐνέργεια, αἱ δὲ περὶ ταῦτα πράξεις δοκοῦσιν ἀσχοιοῖν εἶναι, αἱ μὲν πολεμικαὶ καὶ παντελῶς (οὐδεὶς γὰρ αἰρεῖται τὸ πολεμεῖν τοῦ πολεμεῖν ἕνεκα, οὐδὲ παρασκευάζει πόλεμον· δόξαι γὰρ ἂν παντελῶς μαιφόνος τις εἶναι, εἰ τοὺς φίλους πολεμίους ποιοῖτο, ἵνα μάχαι καὶ φόνοι γίνοντο)· ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἡ τοῦ πολιτικοῦ ἀσχολος, καὶ παρ' αὐτὸ τὸ πολιτεύεσθαι περιποιουμένη δυναστείας καὶ τιμᾶς ἢ τὴν γε εὐδαιμονίαν αὐτῷ καὶ τοῖς πολίταις, ἑτέραν οὖσαν τῆς πολιτικῆς, ἣν καὶ ζητοῦμεν δῆλον ὡς ἑτέραν οὖσαν.

¹⁴ καὶ τὸ τέλος τῶν πρὸς τὸ τέλος αἰρετώτερον δοκεῖ εἶναι

are better. This allows Aristotle to claim that the use of political virtues, and virtues that are good in war time, is not the best because he can claim that happiness is ‘in peace’, applying the following:

And that which is in better or higher or more honourable things is better¹⁵ (*Topics* 116b17)

Peace and leisure are better than war and exertion; the political life is in war and exertion. The suppressed premise here is that contemplation is in peace, and so is in something better. This is another ground for preferring contemplation over the political life.

A summary paragraph follows, which we will skip. Aristotle then raises two further arguments:

And this sort of life is better than one which is human. For thus we do not live in accordance with that which is human, but in accordance with something divine in it. Insofar as this is different from the composite, so will the activity be better than that in accordance with the other virtues. Moreover, if intellect is more divine than human, then the life in accordance with this will be more divine than the human life. For we must not think in accordance with those who argue that, as we are human, we should think of human things, nor being mortal to think of mortal things, but insofar as we are able, to become immortal, and to do everything for the

¹⁵ καὶ τὸ ἐν βελτίοσιν ἢ προτέροις ἢ τιμιωτέροις βέλτιον

life in accordance with the most authoritative thing in us. For even if it is small in size, its power and honour are far greater than everything.¹⁶ (*EN* 1177b26-78a1)

The argument here is that intellect [*nous*] is not merely human, but is something that is divine. For this reason, a life in accordance with it is better than a life in accordance with the other virtues, which are merely human. Aristotle then considers an objection that we should, since we are human, concern ourselves with human things; this, he dismisses. We will leave aside the objection and Aristotle's response to it, and focus on the main argument in the section.

The main argument is an application of the following *topos*:

And that which belongs to the better or more honourable is more choiceworthy, for example that which belongs to god is better than that which belongs to human, and that which belongs to the soul is better than that which belongs to the body¹⁷ (*Topics* 116b13-14)

It's not clear from this *topos* alone that Aristotle is thinking about shared properties as well as properties that are unique to the better thing. But this becomes clear in the next line:

¹⁶ ὁ δὲ τοιοῦτος ἂν εἴη βίος κρείττων ἢ κατ' ἄνθρωπον· οὐ γὰρ ἢ ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν οὕτω βιώσεται, ἀλλ' ἢ θεῖόν τι ἐν αὐτῷ ὑπάρχει· ὅσον δὲ διαφέρει τοῦτο τοῦ συνθέτου, τοσοῦτον καὶ ἡ ἐνέργεια τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἄλλην ἀρετῆν. εἰ δὴ θεῖον ὁ νοῦς πρὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον, καὶ ὁ κατὰ τοῦτον βίος θεῖος πρὸς τὸν ἀνθρώπινον βίον. οὐ γὰρ δὲ κατὰ τοὺς παραινούντας ἀνθρώπινα φρονεῖν ἄνθρωπον ὄντα οὐδὲ θνητὰ τὸν θνητόν, ἀλλ' ἐφ' ὅσον ἐνδέχεται ἀθανατίζειν καὶ πάντα ποιεῖν πρὸς τὸ ζῆν κατὰ τὸ κράτιστον τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ· εἰ γὰρ καὶ τῷ ὄγκῳ μικρόν ἐστι, δυνάμει καὶ τιμιότητι πολὺ μᾶλλον πάντων ὑπερέχει.

¹⁷ καὶ τὸ τῷ βελτίονι καὶ τιμιωτέρῳ ὑπάρχον αἰρετώτερον, οἷον θεῷ ἢ ἀνθρώπῳ, καὶ ψυχῇ ἢ σώματι.

And the peculiar property of the better thing is better than that of the worse thing, for example that of god is better than that of human¹⁸ (*Topics* 116b14-15)

The first of these two *topoi* is indifferent about whether the thing is common or peculiar to the two things under consideration. The second is about only properties that are not shared by the two things. What we have in the passage from the *EN* is an application of the first *topos*: intellect belongs to god, while the practical virtues do not; and so it is better.

The next argument from the passage doesn't instantiate a *topos* from *Topics III*, but this is unsurprising. For the conclusion is not that the life of contemplation is the best, but that it is the one that it makes the most sense for a person to choose. It is only the second argument we have encountered in this section that does not instantiate one of our *topoi*:

For each would seem to be this, if indeed it is the most authoritative and the best. Then it would be strange, if it was to choose not its own life, but some other one.¹⁹ (*EN* 1178a2-4)

I understand this argument in the following way: a person just *is* the intellect, because the intellect is the most authoritative and the best part. So for a *person* to choose a life other than the life of contemplation is for the *intellect* to choose a life other than a life of contemplation;

¹⁸ καὶ τὸ τοῦ βελτίονος ἴδιον βέλτιον ἢ τὸ τοῦ χείρονος, οἷον τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ τὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

¹⁹ δόξειε δ' ἂν καὶ εἶναι ἕκαστος τοῦτο, εἴπερ τὸ κύριον καὶ ἄμεινον. ἄτοπον οὖν γίνοιτ' ἂν, εἰ μὴ τὸν αὐτοῦ βίον αἰροῖτο ἀλλὰ τινος ἄλλου.

but this is a strange decision for the intellect to make, because it's choosing the life of something else.²⁰ The claim here seems to be not that this life is the *best*, but that it is the *most appropriate for a human being*, and *Topics III.1-4* doesn't deal with that issue.

And what we said earlier agrees with what we say now. For the appropriate [*oikeion*] to each is by nature the best and most pleasant for each. And the life according to intellect is [appropriate to] humans, if indeed a human is especially this. This then will also be the happiest. (*EN 1178a4-8*)²¹

The main argument here is that the appropriate to each is by nature the best and most pleasant for each. This is a generalisation of the following *topos*:

While that which is in accordance with the best science is better more choiceworthy *simpliciter*, that which is in accordance with the appropriate science is better and more choice-worthy for a particular thing²² (*Topics 116a21-22*)

The point in this *topos* is that things in accordance with the best science are not always the most beneficial for particular things. The generalisation of this idea is that when we are thinking about what is more choiceworthy for a particular thing, we have to consider not only

²⁰ Gauthier-Jolif rightly point out that the claim that we are the intellect is made elsewhere in the *EN*, e.g 1166a16-17, and that Plato also makes this claim: *Laws* 959a-b, *Alcibiades I*, 130a-d. I will not attempt here an interpretation of this claim.

²¹ τὸ λεχθέν τε πρότερον ἀρμόσει καὶ νῦν· τὸ γὰρ οἰκεῖον ἐκάστῳ τῇ φύσει κράτιστον καὶ ἥδιστόν ἐστιν ἐκάστῳ· καὶ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ δὴ ὁ κατὰ τὸν νοῦν βίος, εἴπερ τοῦτο μάλιστα ἀνθρώπος. οὗτος ἄρα καὶ εὐδαιμονέστατος.

²² ἔστι δ' ἀπλῶς μὲν βέλτιον καὶ αἰρετώτερον τὸ κατὰ τὴν βελτίω ἐπιστήμην, τινὶ δὲ τὸ κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν.

what is best, but also what is appropriate. This final argument is an application of that broader idea: Aristotle, in this passage, recognises the importance of arguing not only that intellect is the best thing, but that it is also appropriate for humans.

The arguments in this passage, with only two exceptions, are instantiations of *topoi* from *Topics III.1–4*. This confirms the claim we made in the previous section that argumentation about the goodness of things in the *EN* is dialectical in the sense of being the kind of argumentation that could be created and evaluated by someone who had developed the abilities described in the *Topics*, taking a view to applying them in philosophical contexts.

Section Two: A Selection of Examples Throughout the *EN*

Because an analysis of just one passage from *EN X* will not, on its own, be convincing, I will give further examples of applications of the *topoi* from *Topics III.1–4* throughout the *EN* in this section.

Our first example comes from the discussion of courage. Here, Aristotle presents an argument that courage is ‘rightly praised’:

For this reason courage concerns pains, and is rightly praised; for it is harder to endure pains, than to refrain from pleasures²³ (*EN III 17a34-35*)

²³ διὸ καὶ ἐπίλυπον ἡ ἀνδρεία, καὶ δικαίως ἐπαινεῖται· χαλεπώτερον γὰρ τὰ λυπηρὰ ὑπομένειν ἢ τῶν ἡδέων ἀπέχεσθαι.

The argument is that courage is rightly praised, because it involves something rather difficult. Indeed, enduring pains is even harder than refraining from pleasures, which is hard enough. The *topos* employed is the following:

Another one: what is more obvious [is better] than the less so, as is the more difficult²⁴ (*Topics* 117b28-9)

Aristotle makes further use of this *topos*.²⁵ For this reason it is worth noting that in the *Topics*, he provides an argument justifying its use:

For we love more that which is not easy to obtain²⁶ (*Topics* 117b29-30)

Our next example is from the discussion of *akrasia*. Here, Aristotle is trying to show that *enkrateia* is more choiceworthy than endurance, and provides the following argument:

For endurance is in resisting, while *enkrateia* is in mastering, and resisting is different from mastering, just as not being beaten is different from winning; and because of this *enkrateia* is more choiceworthy than endurance²⁷ (*EN* 1150a34-b1)

²⁴ Ἄλλος, τὸ ἐπιφανέστερον τοῦ ἥττον τοιούτου, καὶ τὸ χαλεπώτερον.

²⁵ E.g. 1105a10-14; inverted at 1119a25-26;

²⁶ μᾶλλον γὰρ ἀγαπῶμεν ἔχοντες ἢ μὴ ἔστι ραδίως λαβεῖν.

²⁷ Τὸ μὲν γὰρ καρτερεῖν ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἀντέχειν, ἢ δ' ἐγκράτεια ἐν τῷ κρατεῖν, ἕτερον δὲ τὸ ἀντέχειν καὶ κρατεῖν, ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ μὴ ἡττᾶσθαι τοῦ νικᾶν· διὸ καὶ αἰρετώτερον ἐγκράτεια καρτερίας ἐστίν.

The argument here is best reconstructed as an application of two *topoi*. We saw above the *topos* that what is in the better thing is better. Since mastering is better than resisting, and *enkrateia* is in the former, while endurance is in the latter, *enkrateia* is better than endurance. The superiority of mastery to resistance, however, is established on a further ground: mastery is like winning, while resisting is like not being beaten. If we supply Aristotle with the very plausible idea that winning is better than not being beaten, we find an application of the following *topos*:

Moreover of two things, if one is more like a better thing, and the other more like a worse thing, then the one more like the better thing will be better.²⁸ (*Topics*, 117b19-21)

The next example is from a series of arguments showing that friendship is one of the highest goods:

And those who make laws seem to strive for [friendship] more than justice; for harmony is probably something like friendship, and they seek this especially²⁹ (*EN* 1155a23-26)

The *topos* in question here is:

²⁸ πάλιν ἐπὶ δυοῖν, εἰ τὸ μὲν τῷ βελτίονι τὸ δὲ τῷ χείρονι ὁμοιότερον, εἴη ἂν βέλτιον τὸ τῷ βελτίονι ὁμοιότερον.

²⁹ καὶ οἱ νομοθέται μᾶλλον περὶ αὐτὴν σπουδάζειν ἢ τὴν δικαιοσύνην· ἡ γὰρ ὁμόνοια ὁμοίων τι τῇ φιλίᾳ ἔοικεν εἶναι, ταύτης δὲ μάλιστα ἐφίενται

And that which a wise person, or a good man, or a just law would rather choose [is more choiceworthy]³⁰ (*Topics*, 116a14-15)

If a just law would aim at A over B, then A is better than B. And in the passage from the *EN*, we see that indeed, lawmakers usually aim for friendship more than justice, since they are trying to establish harmony – something similar to friendship. The idea here is not just that lawgives aim for friendship, but that they do so rightly. Thus, the text from the *EN* is an application of the *topos* named here.

These examples suffice to show that the prevalence of *topoi* from *Topics* III.1–4 in the passage we analysed is not an isolated incident. As a full survey of the arguments in the *EN* would be tedious, I provide in *Appendix 1* a table surveying the arguments throughout the *EN* with which Aristotle argues that some particular thing is good, or better than something else, or in fact not good, and which lists which *topos*, if any, from the *Topics* the argument in question either instantiates, or is closely related to. This table shows that the argumentation of the *EN* is, although not perfectly, extremely well captured by the list of *topoi* in *Topics* III.1-4.

Section Three: Harm, Goods and Socrates

The *Topics* describes Aristotle’s approach to argumentation well. But this isn’t enough to show that it distinctively describes Aristotle’s argumentation. The purpose of the *Topics* is, after all, to teach people to be good at dialectic. Because dialecticians should be able to talk

³⁰ καὶ ὁ μᾶλλον ἂν ἔλοιτο ὁ φρόνιμος ἢ ὁ ἀγαθὸς ἀνὴρ ἢ ὁ νόμος ὁ ὀρθός

with everyone, we might expect the *Topics* to capture argumentation about the good used in all philosophical schools. In this section, I will show that this is not the same. *Topics III* fails to capture Socrates' argumentation about the good by omitting one of Socrates' most commonly used argument schemes: that what is good never harms. Socrates uses this argument scheme multiple times throughout the Platonic corpus, as well as in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. Significantly, this is an argument scheme that Aristotle wouldn't endorse.

In Plato's dialogues Socrates frequently uses the argument strategy of appealing to some harm that may be caused by an ostensible good, and concluding from this capacity to harm that the thing in question is not good. The argument is that wealth, health, and even the other virtues are only beneficial to wise people; wisdom is the only thing that is beneficial to everybody.

In the *Meno*, the principle that what is good is beneficial is stated at 87e:

Socrates: If they are good, they are useful: for every good is useful, isn't it?

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Socrates elicits a series of questions about when the other virtues are beneficial: each in turn is only beneficial when accompanied by wisdom. Socrates concludes his argument as follows:

³¹ The translations of the *Meno* are a modified version of Grube's in Cooper, *Plato's Works*.
Σωκράτης εἰ δὲ ἀγαθοί, ὠφέλιμοι: πάντα γὰρ τὰγαθὰ ὠφέλιμα. οὐχί;

Socrates: if, then, virtue is something in the soul, and it is necessary that it be beneficial, then it must be wisdom, since everything else in the soul is in itself neither beneficial nor harmful, but it becomes beneficial and harmful when wisdom and folly are present. In accordance with this argument, virtue, being something beneficial, must be wisdom.³² (Plato, *Men.* 88c-d)

We find a similar argument in the *Euthydemus*. Here, a short argument introduces the central principle:

We finally agreed (I don't know how) that, in sum, it was like this: if someone has wisdom, he does not need good fortune: since we agreed on this, I asked him how things stood for us, regarding the things we had agreed on earlier. For we had agreed, I said, that if we have many goods, we will be happy and do well.

He agreed.

But then will we be happy through having goods, if they do not help us or if they benefit us.

If they benefit us, he said.³³ (Plato, *Euth.*, 280b)

³² εἰ ἄρα ἀρετὴ τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ τί ἐστὶν καὶ ἀναγκαῖον αὐτῷ ὠφελίμῳ εἶναι, φρόνησιν αὐτὸ δεῖ εἶναι, ἐπειδὴ περ πάντα τὰ κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτὰ μὲν καθ' αὐτὰ οὔτε ὠφέλιμα οὔτε βλαβερά ἐστιν, προσγενομένης δὲ φρονήσεως ἢ ἀφροσύνης βλαβερά τε καὶ ὠφέλιμα γίγνεται. κατὰ δὲ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ὠφέλιμόν γε οὖσαν τὴν ἀρετὴν φρόνησιν δεῖ τιν' εἶναι.

³³ This is a modified version of Rosamond Kent Sprague's translation in Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*. συνωμολογησάμεθα τελευτῶντες οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως ἐν κεφαλαίῳ οὕτω τοῦτο ἔχειν, σοφίας

In the *Republic*, the principle is used in the opposite direction:

For it is not the work of good to harm, but rather of the opposite.

It seems so.

And a just person is good.

Indeed.

παρούσης, ὅ ἂν παρῇ, μηδὲν προσδεῖσθαι εὐτυχίας: ἐπειδὴ δὲ τοῦτο συνωμολογησάμεθα, πάλιν ἐπυνθανόμην αὐτοῦ τὰ πρότερον ὡμολογημένα πῶς ἂν ἡμῖν ἔχοι. ὡμολογήσαμεν γάρ, ἔφην, εἰ ἡμῖν ἀγαθὰ πολλὰ παρεῖη, εὐδαιμονεῖν ἂν καὶ εὖ πράττειν.

συνέφη.

ἄρ' οὖν εὐδαιμονοῖμεν ἂν διὰ τὰ παρόντα ἀγαθὰ, εἰ μηδὲν ἡμᾶς ὠφελοῖ ἢ εἰ ὠφελοῖ;

εἰ ὠφελοῖ, ἔφη.

Then it is not the work of a just person to harm, Polemarchus, neither a friend, nor anybody else, but of the opposite, of an unjust one.³⁴ (*Republic* 335d)

Socrates not only uses this principle widely in Plato's dialogues. We also find it in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, though here it is put to a rather striking use:

Are these things, then, he said, that sometimes benefit, and sometimes harm, more good than evil?

No indeed, at least, not according to this argument.

But what about wisdom, Socrates, this is indisputably a good: for does not a wise person do everything better than an unlearned person.

What then? He asked, have you not heard of Daedalus who was taken to Minos on account of his wisdom, and was forced to be his slave and was

³⁴ Closely following Grube and Reeve in Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*. οὐδὲ δὴ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ βλάπτειν ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἐναντίου.

φαίνεται.

ὁ δέ γε δίκαιος ἀγαθός;

πάννυ γε.

οὐκ ἄρα τοῦ δικαίου βλάπτειν ἔργον, ὃ Πόλεμαρχε, οὔτε φίλον οὔτ' ἄλλον οὐδένα, ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἐναντίου, τοῦ ἀδίκου.

robbed simultaneously of his country and his freedom, and when he tried to escape with his son, the boy was destroyed, and he was not saved but carried off again to the barbarians and lived there as a slave?³⁵

(*Memorabilia* 4.2.32–33)

The example given is of Daedalus, and the argument is that his wisdom didn't benefit but rather harmed him: a series of examples follow, with which Socrates shows Euthydemus that it is often harmful to be wise, and that wisdom is thus not good. We might observe that later thinkers could add Socrates to the list of people who had been harmed by their wisdom. Because the argument scheme occurs in both Plato and Xenophon's portrayal of Socrates, I would argue that it is likely that the historical Socrates actually did use it. Even if he did not, the presence in both authors shows that it was in relatively wide use.

The principle that goods benefit those who have them is, then, a central part of Socrates' arsenal for arguing about what is, and isn't good. This principle is nowhere to be found in the *Topics*, however. This suggests that *Topics III.1-4* is not an attempt to capture all important strategies for arguing about the good that were popular in Aristotle's time. Instead, it captures Aristotle's approach to arguing about the good, and we can expect tendencies in *Topics III.1-4* to reflect tendencies in the *EN*.

³⁵ Translation H.G Dakyns in *The Works of Xenophon*, with somewhat heavy modifications. ταῦτα οὖν, ἔφη, ποτὲ μὲν ὠφελοῦντα, ποτὲ δὲ βλάπτοντα, μᾶλλον ἀγαθὰ ἢ κακὰ ἐστίν; οὐδὲν μὰ Δία φαίνεται κατὰ γὰρ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον. ἀλλ' ἢ γέ τοι σοφία, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἀναμφισβητήτως ἀγαθὸν ἐστὶ. ποῖον γὰρ ἂν τις πράγμα οὐ βέλτιον πράττοι σοφὸς ὢν ἢ ἄμαθής; τί δέ; τὸν Δαίδαλον, ἔφη, οὐκ ἀκήκοας ὅτι ληφθεὶς ὑπὸ Μίνω διὰ τὴν σοφίαν ἠναγκάζετο ἐκείνῳ δουλεύειν καὶ τῆς τε πατρίδος ἅμα καὶ τῆς ἐλευθερίας ἐστερήθη καὶ ἐπιχειρῶν ἀποδιδράσκειν μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ τὸν τεπαῖδα ἀπώλεσε καὶ αὐτὸς οὐκ ἐδυνήθη σωθῆναι, ἀλλ' ἀπενεχθεὶς εἰς τοὺς βαρβάρους πάλιν ἐκεῖ ἐδούλευε;

Section Four: Merely Dialectical Arguments

There are a great many *topoi* in *Topics III.1-4* that Aristotle does not employ outside the *Topics*. In some cases, this may be an accident: Aristotle, might for example, have thought of a *topos*, included it in *Topics III.1-4*, but never found an opportunity to deploy it. In other cases, however, it hardly looks accidental: some of the *topoi* in *Topics III.1-4* are better adapted to a dialectical exchange than a philosophical inquiry.

One of the clearest example in *Topics III.1-4* is the following:

And more goods are better than fewer, either without qualification, or when the ones are included in the other, the fewer in the more. (An objection: if one is for the sake of the other; for the two are not better than the one, for example, healing and health in comparison with health, since we choose healing for the sake of health. And nothing prevents things which are not all good³⁶ being more choiceworthy, for example happiness with something else which is not good is more choiceworthy than justice and courage)³⁷
(*Topics 117a16-24*)

³⁶ I follow Brunschwig's suggestion of taking the negation of 'goods' as meaning *things which are not all good*, which brings the sense in line with the example. For a discussion of this translation see Brunschwig p. 157.

³⁷ "Ετι τὰ πλείω ἀγαθὰ τῶν ἐλαττόνων, ἢ ἀπλῶς ἢ ὅταν τὰ ἕτερα ἐν τοῖς ἑτέροις ἐνυπάρχη, τὰ ἐλάττω ἐν τοῖς πλείοσιν. (ἔνστασις, εἴ που θάτερον θατέρου χάριν· οὐδὲν γὰρ αἰρετώτερα τὰ ἄμφο τοῦ ἐνός, οἷον τὸ ὑγιάζεσθαι καὶ ἡ ὑγίεια τῆς ὑγείας, ἐπειδὴ τὸ ὑγιάζεσθαι τῆς ὑγείας ἔνεκεν αἰρούμεθα. καὶ μὴ ἀγαθὰ δὲ ἀγαθῶν οὐδὲν κωλύει εἶναι αἰρετώτερα, οἷον εὐδαιμονίαν καὶ ἄλλο τι ὃ μὴ ἔστιν ἀγαθὸν δικαιοσύνης καὶ ἀνδρείας.)

There are two *topoi* here: one can argue that, of two collections of good things, the one with the greater number of goods is better. Or one can argue that a collection of goods is made better when more goods are added to it. Aristotle uses a special case of the second case when discussing pleasure in the *EN*, as we have seen above. But he doesn't use the first case.

The reason is no doubt that the first case is a very unreliable argument, and the problem with it is captured, though somewhat strangely, by the objection Aristotle raises. Aristotle points out that happiness combined with something else, even something not good, is more choiceworthy than justice and courage. The point here could be put differently: happiness on its own is better than justice and courage combined. And the issue is that, because good things vary in value considerably, there's no real reason to think that the greater the number of goods the better. There is no restriction as to when this objection can be applied; it can be applied whenever the *topos* is used.

It is likely that Aristotle discusses this *topos* for two reasons. The first is that it is no doubt sometimes dialectically effective to point out that one is advocating for a greater number of goods.³⁸ The second is that, by comparing the two *topoi*, one is well equipped to respond if someone tries to use the *topos* in a dialectical encounter. One can say that, while it is true when the smaller collection of goods is included in the bigger collection, that the bigger collection is better, it is often not true when they are not, and state the example from the text. In this way, one successfully answers the opponent. Although it's an easy response, having practiced it will allow the interlocutor to respond more surely and quickly. But if this is right,

³⁸ Especially given that dialectic was often carried out in exchanges with *very young* interlocutors. One can imagine, perhaps, catching a Lysis out with this one.

and these are the reasons Aristotle discusses the *topos*, then its inclusion in the *Topics* is no reason for us to conclude that Aristotle would argue like this in a philosophical context.

The next two examples are also not used by Aristotle outside the *Topics*:

And that which we would like to do to a friend compared to that which we would like to do to a person with no particular relation to us is more choiceworthy, for example acting justly and doing well rather than seeming to do so; for we would choose to help a friend rather than to seem to, while it's the other way around for a person with no particular relation to us.³⁹
(*Topics* 118a1-5)

And of two things, if we would deny having the one, in order that the other might appear to belong to us, then that one is more choiceworthy, which we would like to appear to have; for example we deny being hardworking, in order to appear talented⁴⁰ (*Topics* 118a20-24)

Each of these arguments is a useful probe to discover somebody's true beliefs about the good. In the first case we have to imagine that we can choose between doing the one to a friend, and seeming to do one to a stranger, or vice versa: the idea in the example is not the strangely nasty one that we would always prefer to merely seem to benefit someone with no particular

³⁹ καὶ ἂν πρὸς τὸν φίλον πρᾶξαι μᾶλλον βουλόμεθα ἢ ἂν πρὸς τὸν τυχόντα, ταῦτα αἰρετώτερα, οἷον τὸ δικαιοπραγεῖν καὶ εὖ ποιεῖν μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ δοκεῖν· τοὺς γὰρ φίλους εὖ ποιεῖν βουλόμεθα μᾶλλον ἢ δοκεῖν, τοὺς δὲ τυχόντας ἀνάπαλιν.

⁴⁰ καὶ δυοῖν εἰ θάτερον ἄρνούμεθα, ἵνα τὸ λοιπὸν δόξῃ ἡμῖν ὑπάρχειν, ἐκεῖνο ἰρετώτερον ὁ βουλόμεθα δοκεῖν ὑπάρχειν· οἷον φιλοπονεῖν ἄρνούμεθα, ἵν' εὐφυεῖς εἶναι δόξωμεν.

relation to us. But rather, the idea is that, if we had to choose, we would really benefit a friend and seem to benefit someone with no particular relationship to us, rather than the other way around.⁴¹

The problem with trying to use these arguments in a philosophical context is finding premises that are plausible. In a philosophical context, we would need to construct the premises about near universal preferences. We may find this difficult: Aristotle's example about talent and hardwork may be correct in most cases, but it's difficult to be sure. And similarly, we only very seldom see people in positions where they have two things, and must give one to someone unrelated to them, and the other to a friend.

In a dialectical context, however, these constraints are not so important. So long as our opponent has the appropriate preferences, we might well secure our conclusion on that basis. In any case, there is surely little harm in asking, and a lot to be gained. Furthermore, these questions, because they are slightly unusual, are a good way to prompt an interlocutor to reflect on their values, bringing deeper preferences to the surface. So these two *topoi* are useful in dialectical contexts, but not so useful in philosophical ones.

A final example is worth mentioning. In this case, while the *topos* itself is probably perfectly acceptable in philosophical contexts, Aristotle's advice about its application is aimed at the dialectician:

⁴¹ It's difficult to see who would doubt that benefiting someone is better for them; I take it that the example here is meant, in part, to justify the *topos*, and for this reason something trivially beneficial has been chosen.

Moreover when two things are very close to each other, and we cannot see any advantage of the one over the other, look to the things that accompany them.

For that which something good follows is more choiceworthy. And when that which follows is bad, that which is followed by something less bad is more choiceworthy. For even if both are choiceworthy, nothing prevents something difficult accompanying them. The search for what follows is two-fold: for things follow earlier and later, for example in the case of learning, ignorance follows earlier, and knowledge later. The later consequence is usually better. Now, you should take whichever of the two consequences is useful⁴² (*Topics 117a5-16*)

Here Aristotle talks about “what accompanies” and “what follows”. From the example, it looks like Aristotle is talking about what is entailed by something: learning entails being ignorant beforehand, and knowing later (otherwise it’s simply not learning). The *topos* is presented as a way of differentiating between two things that are almost as good as each other, and I see nothing objectionable about it. Nevertheless, note that Aristotle concludes the passage by suggesting choosing whichever kind of consequence is more useful. This is good advice for a dialectician who might draw the short straw and wind up having to argue that

⁴² Ἐτι ὅταν δύο τινα ἢ σφόδρα αὐτοῖς παραπλήσια καὶ μὴ δυνώμεθα ὑπεροχὴν μηδεμίαν συνιδεῖν τοῦ ἑτέρου πρὸς τὸ ἕτερον, ὁρᾶν ἀπὸ τῶν παρεπομένων. ὃ γὰρ ἔπεται μείζον ἀγαθόν, τοῦθ' αἰρετώτερον· ἂν δ' ἢ τὰ ἐπόμενα κακά, ὃ τὸ ἔλαττον ἀκολουθεῖ κακόν, τοῦθ' αἰρετώτερον· ὄντων γὰρ ἀμφοτέρων αἰρετῶν οὐδὲν κωλύει δυσχερές τι παρέπεσθαι διχῶς δ' ἀπὸ τοῦ ἔπεσθαι ἢ σκέψις· καὶ γὰρ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον ἔπεται, οἷον τῷ μανθάνοντι τὸ μὲν ἀγνοεῖν πρότερον, τὸ δ' ἐπίστασθαι ὕστερον. βέλτιον δ' ὥς ἐπὶ πολὺ τὸ ὕστερον ἐπόμενον. λαμβάνειν οὖν τῶν ἐπομένων ὁπότερον ἂν ἢ χρήσιμον.

learning is bad, for example: but it is not such good advice for a philosopher, who should presumably provide an even-handed assessment of the things that follow.

Several of the *topoi* in *Topics III.1-4*, then, are then better adapted to a dialectical than a philosophical context. This supports our claim that, when Aristotle said that dialectic was useful for searching for first principles, he meant this in a peculiar way. Aristotle is more selective of the *topoi* from which he argues in philosophical contexts. Nevertheless, the *topoi* used in the *EN* to argue about what is good are taken from among those in the *Topics*, reflecting the fact that the skilful investigator of the good needs no specialised knowledge, but merely the general ability at reasoning that is dialectic.

Section Five: Rank and Search

In this section, I show how Aristotle's view of the challenge of investigating the good, namely, that it involves finding the highest good, manifests itself in the argumentation in *Topics III.1-4*. In particular, I will show how the arguments are particularly well adapted to be employed in the overall-strategy of rank and search.

The *topoi* in *Topics III.1-4* are all stated in terms of a comparison: they let you tell which of two things is better. When a comparison is being carried out, the risks are clearly symmetrical: to incorrectly rank something higher than something else is also to incorrectly rank something lower than something else. In many cases, Aristotle argues for the superiority of one thing over another by applying just one *topos*. In the most important and difficult case, that of determining whether the life of contemplation or the political life is better, however,

Aristotle minimises the risk of misranking by applying a very large number of *topoi*, which all point in the same direction.

In the *Topics*, Aristotle outlines how to convert comparative *topoi* into *topoi* useful for arguing that something is choiceworthy or to be avoided:

We have said how it is necessary to make comparisons of things with each other. The same *topoi* are useful for showing what is to be chosen or avoided; for it is necessary just to take away the relation to something else. For if the more honourable is more choiceworthy, then the honourable is choiceworthy, and if the more useful is more choiceworthy, the useful is choiceworthy. Similarly in the other cases, which have such a comparison. For in some cases of comparison with another thing, we say immediately, and we say immediately that either one or both is choiceworthy, for example when we say that the one is good by nature, the other not by nature; for it is obvious that the good by nature is choiceworthy.⁴³ (*Topics* 119a1-12)

The advice in this passage is simply to remove the comparative element from the *topoi*. Although Aristotle mentions showing things that are to be avoided, both of his examples are of *topoi* that show that something is to be chosen. This is no accident: it's often not obvious

⁴³ Τὰς μὲν οὖν πρὸς ἄλληλα συγκρίσεις καθάπερ εἴρηται ποιητέον. οἱ αὐτοὶ δὲ τόποι χρήσιμοι καὶ πρὸς τὸ δεικνύειν ὅτιον αἰρετόν ἢ φευκτόν· ἀφαιρεῖν γὰρ μόνον δεῖ τὴν πρὸς ἕτερον ὑπεροχὴν. εἰ γὰρ τὸ τιμιώτερον αἰρετώτερον, καὶ τὸ τίμιον αἰρετόν, καὶ εἰ τὸ χρησιμώτερον αἰρετώτερον, καὶ τὸ χρησίμον αἰρετόν. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων, ὅσα τοιαύτην ἔχει τὴν σύγκρισιν. ἐπ' ἐνίων γὰρ εὐθέως κατὰ τὴν πρὸς ἕτερον σύγκρισιν καὶ ὅτι αἰρετόν ἐκάτερον ἢ τὸ ἕτερον λέγομεν, οἷον ὅταν τὸ μὲν φύσει ἀγαθὸν τὸ δὲ μὴ φύσει λέγωμεν· τὸ γὰρ φύσει ἀγαθὸν δῆλον ὅτι αἰρετόν ἔστιν.

how to get from the comparative version of the *topos* to one showing that something is to be avoided. Somewhat surprisingly, as we will see when we discuss the examples below, the tasks of showing something is more to be chosen and that of showing something is more to be avoided are not symmetrical. Aristotle doesn't even mention *topoi* that would show simply that something is not to be chosen, that is, that it occupies a neutral position between good and bad.

It will help to illustrate these points with a few examples. Let us consider, again, this set of *topoi*:

And that which a wise person or a good man or a right law would rather choose, or those talented about each thing insofar as they are such, or those knowledgeable in each domain, either most or all, for example in medicine or construction either most doctors or all, or in general most people or all people or all things, as in the case of the good; for all things seek the good.

(*Topics* 116a16–20)⁴⁴

Let's focus on the 'most people' version of the argument. Removing the comparison, we get the *topos*:

What most people choose is choiceworthy

⁴⁴ καὶ ὁ μᾶλλον ἂν ἔλοιτο ὁ φρόνιμος ἢ ὁ ἀγαθὸς ἀνὴρ ἢ ὁ νόμος ὁ ὀρθὸς ἢ οἱ σπουδαῖοι περὶ ἕκαστα αἰρούμενοι ἢ τοιοῦτοί εἰσιν ἢ οἱ ἐν ἐκάστῳ γένει ἐπιστήμονες, ἢ οἱ πλείους ἢ πάντες, οἷον ἐν ἱατρικῇ ἢ τεκτονικῇ ἢ οἱ πλείους τῶν ἱατρῶν ἢ πάντες, ἢ ὅσα ὅλως οἱ πλείους ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντα, οἷον τὰγαθόν· πάντα γὰρ τὰγαθοῦ ἐφίεται.

But how do you get the negative versions of the argument? Are they:

What most people would not choose is not to be chosen

What most people would avoid is to be avoided

The problem is that while most people choosing something is a sign that they at least think it's good, most people not choosing something is no sign that they don't think it's good. Rather, it might be that they think it's good, but just not as good as other things. If fewer and fewer people are spending time reading, this is not necessarily because people like reading less; it seems rather to be simply that they like Netflix more. Similarly, people often avoid things because they seem them as distractions from better things. This is not to say that the argument is completely useless; but it is rather less compelling than the positive version.

The positive version of course has its problems, and the fact that Aristotle is willing to tolerate them speaks to his relative lack of concern for false positives. It is clearly possible for most people to choose something, even though it's not good for them. Facebook, for example, is extremely popular among young adults, although using it probably makes them unhappy.⁴⁵ That such examples are possible to find might make one hesitate to use the *topos*. Whether it will depends on how reluctant one is to assume that something is good when it isn't. If one thinks that the most important thing is to identify all the good things, without leaving any out, and is willing to tolerate including a few things that aren't actually good, then the *topos* might be acceptable.

⁴⁵ Kross et. al., "Facebook Use Predicts Declines in Subjective Well-Being in Young Adults"

The same issues arise around the following *topos*:

Another *topos*: the closer to the good is better and more choiceworthy, as is the more similar to the good⁴⁶ (*Topics 117b10-11*)

Some things that are similar to good things are not themselves good. While this *topos* gives some reason to think that something is good, it will also speak in favour of things that are not good. The *topos* is reasonably easily reversed: the more similar something is to something bad, the worse it is likely to be. But Aristotle doesn't mention this strategy; his students would have to come up with it on their own. Furthermore, many merely apparent goods will be indifferent, rather than bad, and it's not clear how this *topos* could be used in their cases: is being similar to an indifferent itself evidence of indifference?

The following case illustrates these issues particularly sharply:

The longer lasting and more durable is more choiceworthy than the less so⁴⁷
(*Topics 116a13-14*)

This *topos* importantly only works when considering things already assumed to be choiceworthy. Things are also more to be avoided when they are more durable and longer lasting: a durable conflict or resentment, for example, is more to be avoided than one that is easily fixed, and a longer lasting pain is more to be avoided than a shorter one. Producing,

⁴⁶ Ἄλλος τόπος, τὸ ἐγγύτερον τἀγαθοῦ βέλτιον καὶ αἰρετώτερον, καὶ τὸ ὁμοιώτερον τἀγαθῷ

⁴⁷ Πρῶτον μὲν οὖν τὸ πολυχρονιώτερον ἢ βεβαιώτερον αἰρετώτερον τοῦ ἥττον τοιούτου

following Aristotle's advice, a non-comparative *topos* gets the result that one can argue that something is choiceworthy just because it is long-lasting, a result that certainly allows for many false-positives.⁴⁸ It's not clear how the *topos* could be modified to show that apparently choiceworthy things were not choiceworthy: discovering that something thought to be choiceworthy doesn't last very long might make us think it's less choiceworthy, but certainly won't make us doubt that it's choiceworthy at all.

This *topos* illustrates well the important point that supplying *topoi* for *undermining* apparent goods claims to goodness and *showing that things to be avoided* is not a trivial task even once a set of *topoi* of comparison have been produced, and that the advice simply to remove the comparative element to gain *topoi* showing that things are good will lead to an approach of studying the goodness of things that tends to err on the side of assuming that things are good.

In *Topics III*, then, we find that Aristotle is most interested in making comparisons. His secondary interest is in supplying reasons for thinking that things might be good. Although he mentions supplying reasons for thinking that things might be bad, he seems to have devoted little thought to this topic. He appears to have devoted very little thought to the more general task of showing that something apparently good is not good. The *topoi* in *Topics III* therefore reflect a disregard for the risk of false positives, a disregard that fits in well with Aristotle's overall strategy of rank and search.

⁴⁸ Aristotle rejects Plato's use of this *topos* at *EE* 1.8.1218a12–14, where it is supposed to show that something is better. My best guess about these two texts is that Aristotle thinks longer lasting things are more choiceworthy, without for that being better. It does make some sense to think of duration and quality as being two dimensions along which choiceworthiness could be measured, and to think one doesn't increase something's quality just by extending it, although one makes it more desirable.

Conclusion: Two Different Takes on Dialectic

This discussion has brought us to the close of the section on Aristotle, and it is worth taking stock of what we have seen so far. In the *Philebus*, we saw Socrates engaged in a dialectical argument with Protarchus, in which his objective was to offer arguments that could do what rhetoric could not: reveal to someone something at odds with their character, in order to turn them towards virtue. Socrates' arguments are adapted to Protarchus' beliefs, and consist in abstract tests of a thing's goodness, combined with observations about metaphysical or psychological matters that can be agreed with a view to circumventing Protarchus' hedonistic orientation. In the *EN*, we find that Aristotle has a dimmer view on the possibility of philosophical protreptic: although knowledge of the good may be possible for those of bad character, only those with a minimally good upbringing are likely to apply this knowledge in their lives. And the arguments of the *EN* do not aim at refutation of a particular person, but rather at developing a case for believing that a certain thing is the highest good. They are dialectical in the sense of being arguments that can be understood, evaluated, and invented by someone with only the capacity of dialectic, developed philosophically: they require no specialist knowledge to engage with or assess.

Aristotle places an importance on identifying the highest good that Socrates doesn't in the *Philebus*, and this provides a further point of contrast between the argumentation each prefers. For Aristotle, only interested in the identity of the highest good, adapts the strategy of rank and search: identifying possible candidates for the good, and then comparing them with the sole purpose of finding the highest. Socrates is much more concerned with the positions of lesser goods, attempting to correctly identify the first five places on the hierarchy.

Aristotle's preference for arguments that identify good things over those that disqualify good things would likely lead to differences in opinion irresolvable through presenting arguments directly about the goodness of things.

Aristotle, however, shares some presuppositions about argumentation about the goodness of things with the *Philebus*' Socrates. In particular, they seem to share the presupposition that one should shape one's belief about the goodness of things to the conclusions of the strongest dialectical argument, rather than on what simply *seems* best, when it has been properly imagined. This requires a certain level in confidence that good things have certain properties that can be identified, such as being attractive, or difficult, and that we can more or less correctly name these properties. It also involves conceptualising the study of goodness as a study of the objects of our desires, rather than of our desires themselves, and so assumes an independence of goodness from our desires.

These two shared assumptions will, we will see, be denied by Seneca and the Epicureans. In Seneca's hands, arguments become a tool for guiding imaginative practices aimed at correctly orienting various psychological capacities for recognising the good, psychological capacities he believes are hampered by considering the minutiae dialectical arguments. And for the Epicureans, we will see, the study of goodness is a study of the conditions under which we desire things, and the impacts of these desires on our satisfaction: the study of the goodness of things in Epicurus' hands ceases to be a study of the properties of objects we might pursue, and becomes instead a study of human psychology. Their understanding of the goals of argumentation are so different from Aristotle's that the argument strategies they employ would often fail even to look like serious attempts at good argument if approached

from an Aristotelian perspective. But the same is true in reverse. Offering an Epicurean argument to an Aristotelian or an Aristotelian argument to a Senecean Stoic would be fruitless; nevertheless, each kind of argument will make good sense in the context of each philosopher's understanding of the argumentative context, and it is hard to find much fault with any of these competing understandings.

~Seneca~

Finding Fakes

In this chapter, I am going to discuss how Seneca understood the context and goals of argumentation about the good. As this is a departure from the ordinary way of approaching Stoicism, which would usually involve the careful study of the fragmentary evidence of the earlier Stoics, as well as a fair amount of time on Cicero's *De Finibus*, I would like to take some time to outline why I am choosing to focus on Seneca. As will see, it's because, in the context of the development that I am discussing, Seneca is particularly interesting.

The main reason is that the quality of the texts, for our purposes, is by far the richest in Seneca. An argumentation theoretic approach requires an analysis both of a thinker's understanding of the context of argumentation in which they are operating and on the argument schemes that the thinker would use. Seneca's work, and especially his *EM*, contains a considerable amount of discussion of these issues: in particular, in *EM* 82 and *EM* 83 letter, Seneca criticises the practice of dialectic and how this shaped (at least some) earlier Stoic argumentation.¹ In *EM* 87 we find a discussion of a collection of argument schemes, which

¹ By dialectic here I mean the kind of discussions that we find depicted in Plato's dialogues and described in Aristotle's *Topics*, which is continuous with the Stoics' definition as, dialectic is "the science of correct discussion in regard to discourses conducted by question and answer, so that they also define it as the science of what is true and false and neither". (*DL* 7.41–4, translation from Long and Sedley). Seneca's target when he addresses dialectic is primarily the context of discourses of question and answer, though, as we will see, he agrees with earlier Stoics as seeing this as closely connected with the dialectical science of true and false.

capture most of Seneca's argumentation about the good in *De Ira*, *De Vita Beata*, and *De Clementia*. From the point of an argumentation theoretic analysis, this is a wealth of texts that is simply unavailable in other Stoic sources, which are often fragmentary or less sophisticated from an argumentation theoretic perspective.

Cicero, like Seneca, is well aware of argumentation theoretic concerns.. Cicero had a passion for theories of persuasion. As a source for argumentation theoretical issues, however, we might perhaps complain that, especially in *De Finibus*, Cicero is too sophisticated. Importantly, Cicero was not a Stoic, but rather an academic sceptic, and as such he brings his own understanding of the argumentative context to the debate.² This is an understanding in which arguments from different schools can effectively be weighed and measured by a common standard; furthermore, it is a standard that is not favourable to Stoic arguments, which, even in Cicero's able and agile rhetorical hands, famously turn into leaden daggers. Insofar as we may hope to gain argumentation theoretical insights that are *sympathetic* to the Stoic position, taking the argumentative context of a convinced Stoic such as Seneca has obvious advantages. It is at least necessary for a full understanding of the ancient evidence to be clear on Seneca's position, and there are as yet no very satisfactory accounts that bring together these themes from the *EM*.

Unfortunately Seneca, at least as far as argumentation theoretical matters are concerned, was a heretic. He rejected, after all, not only Zeno of Citium's syllogisms on death and drunkenness, but also a whole tradition of commenting on them that included the middle Stoics to whom Seneca is usually heavily indebted, such as Poseidonius. In this chapter,

² On Cicero's scepticism, see Capello, *The School of Doubt: Skepticism, History and Politics in Cicero's Academica*.

therefore, some of what I bring out about Seneca's argumentation will be just about Seneca, and not about Stoicism more generally. In coming to terms with these facts about Seneca's understanding of the argumentative context, I found for myself a far deeper appreciation of Seneca as a philosopher, and I believe what I offer here is at least valuable for understanding Seneca, and shows at least some value for an argument theoretical approach in reading rather eccentric figures in history. In particular, the rejection of *dialectic*, and the view of dialectical arguments as epistemically crippled, is only Seneca's. And I think we can both better understand the disappointment we, as philosophers, often feel in reading Seneca, and approach him on more sympathetic terms once we appreciate that he is not trying to refute us, and why this is so.

Seneca was, however, still a Stoic, and some aspects of this study will be more generally applicable. I will argue in this chapter that, in Seneca, we find not only a rejection of dialectical argument strategies, but also a particular concern with *finding fakes*³: that is, identifying things that appear to be good, but are not really good. Not least among these was the cost of wasting tracts of your life, a cost Seneca compares to premature death.⁴ More seriously, the allure of fools' goods held people back when it was necessary to suffer and die, causing potentially damning hesitations.⁵ And, perhaps worst of all, it was impossible to maintain a coherent identity while pursuing fools' goods.⁶ Since he saw the costs as so high,

³ In the introduction of *VB*, for example, Seneca urges us to "seek something which is good not in appearance, but soundly and level and more beautiful in those parts that are less seen" (*Quaeramus aliquod non in speciem bonum, sed solidum et aequale et a secretiore parte formosius*; 3.1)

⁴ *De Brevitate Vita* 3.2

⁵ *EM* 82.18

⁶ *EM* 120.22. Margaret Graver discusses the Stoic idea that our natural tendency towards truth goes systematically wrong in *Stoicism and Emotion*: 149–151.

Seneca devoted careful attention to the best method for discerning the true goods from the false.

As we saw in the earlier chapter on Aristotle, finding fakes was not a concern for Aristotle, and as such, if this concern generalises throughout the Stoa it will serve as an important part of the explanation of disagreement between Stoics and Peripatetics about the good.

Section One: Appealing to God; Appealing to the People

One motivation for using Seneca in this chapter is to try to vindicate some of the arguments that have puzzled secondary sources on Stoicism since at least as far back as Cicero. Seneca, at least, was convinced by Stoicism, so his work might give us some clues that will help us see the philosophical value in arguments long dismissed. The secondary literature on Stoicism typically avoids discussing direct Stoic deductions about ethics, seeing these as less essential and less philosophically successful aspects of the overall case for Stoic ethics.⁷ Instead, commentators tend to try to emphasise either how Stoic ethics makes good sense in light of Stoic cosmology (I will call this the *cosmological* approach), or against the background of ancient intuitions about ethics (I will call this the *popular* approach. Although there is considerable value to both of these approaches, they do not really help us understand some of the arguments that Stoics repeated over the centuries, and which seem to have been arguments the Stoics themselves thought were important. I will illustrate these approaches by discussing Long's and Annas' accounts, because these accounts should be familiar to readers, and because I think there is a lot right in these accounts. What I offer here is not meant as a

⁷ A very clear, relatively recent statement of this view on these arguments can be found in Brennan, *The Stoic Life*: 121–122.

specific criticism of either Long or Annas, both in that it's not specific, and it is not really critical. Rather, what I'm offering is a *generic observation* about what is missing in these approaches, and why it is desirable that we fill in this gap of our grasp of Stoic ethics.

The version of the cosmological approach I will consider here is Long's. Long's approach has been highly influential, and represents, reasonably well, a way of thinking of the foundations of Stoic ethics that retains its popularity among scholars of Stoicism.

Long highlights several theses from Stoic cosmology that he sees essential to their argument that virtue is the only good:

“First, determinism; second, divine providence; third, the availability of happiness to every normal person; fourth, the perfectibility of reason”⁸

The third thesis, which Long sees as a corollary of the first two, does most of the heavy lifting. Since happiness is available to every normal person, but wealth, the availability of bodily pleasures and pains, longevity, and so on, are not available to every normal person (nor could they have been – because of determinism), none of these things can be necessary conditions for happiness. Virtue, and the kinds of good psychological states and actions virtue affords, are the only familiar elements of happiness that are available to every normal person (presumably this follows from the fourth thesis), and so these must be sufficient.⁹

⁸Long “Stoic Eudaimonism”: 100

⁹ Ibid. especially 95-97 and 100

The essence of the Stoic argument, as Long reconstructs it, is that the divine, being provident, placed happiness under every normal person's control, and that virtue is the only good that is under every normal person's control. If any other goods made a difference to human happiness, happiness wouldn't be achievable for every normal person: for example, whether we live a pleasant life is not entirely under our control. If pleasure was an important component of happiness, then happiness would not be entirely under our control either. Let's call this argument the *availability* argument.

The availability argument is open to obvious objections. First, why should divine providence ensure that happiness was available to every normal person, but not that every person actually was happy? And second, it's not clear that people have control over whether they become virtuous or not. This will depend, among other things, on whether they have time for philosophical reflection, and perhaps whether they get a chance to read Stoic thought. The argument is very unlikely to seem even minimally reasonable to a modern reader of the Stoics.

The thought here, however, is that the Stoic position doesn't need to be convincing to a modern reader. It only needs to be convincing to someone who believed in Stoic cosmology, which modern readers don't. The objections in the previous paragraph could perhaps have been answered by details of precisely how the Stoics conceive of divine providence, and what their account of human freedom is – in what sense it makes sense to speak of virtue being available to those who do not have virtue in a deterministic universe. If the main justification for Stoic ethics lies in Stoic cosmology, then, since Stoic cosmology is no longer a compelling position, their ethics will not be one either.

While connections between Stoic cosmology and Stoic ethics are surely an important part of the story about why Stoics found their moral theory compelling, this is at most one pathway by which Stoics justified their moral theory. For the texts that remain on Stoic ethics contain many arguments that do not appeal to cosmological considerations. A full understanding of Stoicism, from the point of view of the history of philosophy, will also involve understanding why the Stoics saw these arguments as compelling.¹⁰ As Annas has ably argued, this also assumes a priority of theology over ethics that cannot be justified in the case of Stoicism.¹¹

None of this is to deny that there is an intimate relationship between Stoic cosmology and Stoic ethics. On the most plausible readings of Stoicism, the Stoic sage spends a good portion of their life contemplating the order of the universe, and comes to see their own life as just a part of the divine creature that is the cosmos; this sense of perspective is, I think, an essential component of Stoic virtue, and is, as we will see in the next chapter, part of what enables the Stoic sage to completely disdain such things as pleasure, wealth and honour.¹² But, as we will also see in the next chapter, we realise that the Stoic sage has such an outlook at least in part by considering what a virtuous person would be like from arguments that are more ethical than cosmological in nature.

¹⁰ Annas, in *Morality of Happiness*: 160-166, argues along similar lines, that this kind of cosmic reflection is not the right kind to engage moral motivation, and that the concepts of happiness arrived at in this way are too thin and need to be developed better by doing ethics, which she sees as separable from cosmology. A key point of difference is that my objection focuses on making sense of arguments that are actually in Stoic texts that Annas, like Long, is unable to render compelling. My diagnosis in Annas' case is that she holds that "the procedures at this stage [sc. in ethics] do not appear to have been very different from Aristotle's". It is only by looking at what evidence we do have about the *procedures* that we can see first, that Stoicism is not even uniform in procedures (as Seneca at least was a heretic), and, second, that it certainly was quite different from Aristotle.

¹¹ *Morality of Happiness*: 166.

¹² On this, see Menn, "Physics as a Virtue"

We turn next to *popular approaches*. Popular approaches try to find some belief, widely held in the ancient world, which the Stoic system is uniquely well adapted to account for. The classic presentation of this position is Annas' *Morality of Happiness*. She argues that the idea that a virtuous person would be able to secure happiness for themselves, in any situation whatsoever, was deeply entrenched in the ancient Greek *Zeitgeist*. The disagreement between Stoics and Peripatetics reflects a tension in a broader ancient way of looking at things: people believed that pleasure and honour and other external things were good, and they believed that happiness was always in the grasp of the virtuous. Differences between Stoics and Peripatetics can be captured in that, methodologically, they are both trying to capture popular beliefs, but these are in tension; each chooses one side of this tension:

Theophrastus, goes one way, committing himself clearly to the necessity for external goods in the happy life. The Stoics go the other way, committing themselves clearly to the thesis that virtue is sufficient for happiness.¹³

The view that pleasure, honour, and so on were goods remains popular, but the view that the virtuous person can always attain happiness has given way to a greater emphasis on human vulnerability. This emphasis on human vulnerability makes it difficult for us to understand why any ancient would have been drawn to Stoicism. But to the ancient Greek or Roman,

¹³ *Morality of Happiness*: 385

both the Stoic and the Aristotelian position looked like they carried seriously counterintuitive consequences.

What is the evidence that the ancients would have had difficulty accepting the Peripatetic claim that virtue was not sufficient for happiness? Annas points out that Theophrastus was mocked for rejecting the claim that virtue was sufficient for happiness. Her best evidence for this is the following text, from Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*:

However, this most elegant and learned of all philosophers [Theophrastus] is not greatly criticized when he says that there are three kinds of good, but he is attacked by all, first for that book that he wrote on the happy life, in which he offers many arguments to show why the person who is tortured and tormented cannot be happy. In it he is even thought to say that the happy life does not ascend on to the wheel (that is a kind of Greek torture). (*TD* 5.24)¹⁴

The quote does suggest that Theophrastus' book on the happy life was controversial, the subject of much criticism. That Theophrastus felt it necessary to argue at length that a virtuous person being tortured was not a happy saint, and that he attracted criticism for doing so, does suggest that many people in the ancient world thought that virtue was sufficient for happiness. The text does suggest that by Theophrastus' time the position that virtue was

¹⁴ I give Annas' translation from *The Morality of Happiness*: 386 here, since it is the most useful for understanding her position. The Latin is as follows: Hic autem elegantissimus omnium philosophorum et eruditissimus non magno opere reprehenditur, cum tria genera dicit bonorum, vexatur autem ab omnibus primum in eo libro quem scripsit de vita beata, in quo multa disputat, quam ob rem is, qui torqueatur, qui crucietur, beatus esse non possit; in eo etiam putatur dicere in rotam—id est genus tormenti apud Graecos—beatam vitam non ascendere. Non usquam id quidem dicit omnino, sed quae dicit idem valent.

sufficient for happiness was very popular in philosophical circles. It is much harder to draw the inference that the text was widely accepted by the general public or the broader culture, since the text is only commenting on a philosophical debate, and so the case that there is a tension in widely accepted beliefs about virtue is somewhat tenuous. Nonetheless, the wide acceptance of the belief that virtue was sufficient for happiness does mark a significant difference in the status of the claim in the ancient debate from the contemporary one, in which few would spare a moment's thought for the idea that a virtuous person could not be made miserable.

Cicero mentions Theophrastus in this context to contrast him with Aristo of Ceos and Antiochus, who, at least by his account, maintained that virtue was sufficient for happiness, but that the external goods, such as pleasure and wealth, could make a person happier. Cicero is actually here praising Theophrastus for his consistency, in contrast to these two philosophers: if a life can be made happier, it is not complete, argues Cicero, and so is not happy. It is therefore, according to Cicero, at least, inconsistent to maintain both that virtue is sufficient for happiness, and that it's not the only good. His remark here is that it is surprising that Theophrastus is so widely criticized for his book on the happy life, and not for his doctrine that there are three kinds of good. If people don't like his position on the happy life, argues Cicero, they shouldn't like his position on goods either.

There is good reason to doubt that the claim that virtue was sufficient for happiness was a popular position outside of philosophical circles. When Plato portrays Socrates as arguing that it is better to suffer, than commit an injustice in the *Gorgias*, he has Polus react by saying:

Don't you think you've been refuted already, Socrates, when you're saying things the likes of which no human being would maintain? Just ask any one of these people.¹⁵ [*Gorgias*, 437e]

Polus, at least, doesn't find it plausible that it's better to suffer, than commit an injustice, and doesn't think his contemporaries do, either. It is something that Socrates will have to work hard to convince him of, if he's going to do so at all. Similarly, Aristotle, in the *EN*, says:

Those who say that a person being broken on the wheel and a person who has fallen into great misfortunes is happy, so long as he is good, are either on purpose or not, saying nothing.¹⁶ [*EN* 1153b19-21]

Aristotle, at least when writing this passage, saw the position that a person being tortured or suffering severe misfortunes was happy as being easy to dismiss out of hand. These passages suggest strongly that to the ancients, the position that virtue was sufficient for happiness was also highly counterintuitive. It seems very unlikely that an ancient school would have accepted a counterintuitive theory of goods simply because it was the only way to maintain this thesis.

¹⁵ Translation Zeyl. Οὐκ οἶει ἐξεληλέγχθαι, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὅταν τοιαῦτα λέγῃς ἃ οὐδεὶς ἂν φήσειεν ἀνθρώπων; ἐπεὶ ἐροῦ τίνα τούτωνί.

¹⁶ οἱ δὲ τὸν τροχιζόμενον καὶ τὸν δυστυχίαις μεγάλαις περιπίπτοντα εὐδαίμονα φάσκοντες εἶναι, ἐὰν ᾗ ἀγαθός, ἢ ἐκόντες ἢ ἄκοντες οὐδὲν λέγουσιν.

Further, Cicero doesn't himself seem to think that the view that virtue is the only good is more difficult to maintain than the view that virtue is sufficient for happiness. For Cicero has *M*¹⁷ raise the following question:

Philosophers, whatever matter they may have in their hands, collect everything that is relevant to it, even if they have examined it using another strategy. For were this not thus, why would a Stoic say more about the question of whether virtue could be enough for living happily. It would be enough for him to reply that he had taught before that nothing is good except what is fine, and this being proven it followed that the happy life with virtue was content, and just that this follows that, so this that, so that, if the happy life with virtue is content, nothing else will be good, unless it is fine. But however they do not proceed thus; for the books about the fine and about the highest good are separate, and since from this it is effected that great force in virtue is enough for living happily, it is nevertheless dealt with separately; since whatever the matter is, it is necessary to bring out its own arguments and admonitions, especially on such great matters.¹⁸ (*Tusc. V.18-19*)

¹⁷ One of the speakers in the *Tusculans*, quite probably a voice representing Cicero himself.

¹⁸ philosophi, quamcumque rem habent in manibus, in eam quae conveniunt, congruent omnia, etsi alio loco disputata sunt. Quod ni ita esset, cur Stoicus, si esset quaesitum, satisne ad beate vivendum virtus posset, multa diceret? Cui satis esset respondere se ante docuisse nihil bonum esse nisi quod honestum esset, hoc probato consequens esse beatam vitam virtute esse contentam, et quo modo hoc sit consequens illi, sic illud huic, ut, si beata vita virtute contenta sit, nisi honestum quod sit, nihil aliud sit bonum. Sed tamen non agunt sic; nam de honesto et de summo bono separatim libri sunt, et cum ex eo efficiatur satis magnam in virtute ad beate vivendum esse vim, nihilo minus hoc agunt separatim; propriis enim et suis argumentis et admonitionibus tractanda quaeque res est, tanta praesertim.

Here, Cicero claims that the Stoics could well have argued that virtue was sufficient for happiness simply by building on their demonstrations that only that which was honourable was good. They did not, because they thought it better to deal with each issue separately. This view of things is strongly at odds with the idea that the theory of the good was an uncomfortable position maintained in order to avoid giving up a fundamental belief about the sufficiency of virtue for happiness. But in this case, we ought not to take the position that virtue is sufficient for happiness as an appearance to be saved, but rather try to understand the Stoic arguments supporting it, and supporting, independently, the case that only virtue is good.

Both the popular approach and the cosmological approach constitute attempts to look for something more compelling than the syllogisms we find in Stoic texts. The thought driving these approaches is that the arguments we find explicitly for the Stoic sufficiency thesis are so very bad that they must not embody the reasons that Stoics actually had for taking up their positions. But the arguments that appear in Stoic accounts of the goodness or badness of things belong to an argumentative tradition and a set of argumentative practices rather distinct from our own. By understanding these argumentative practices better, we can bring these arguments into much clearer view.

Section Two: Zeno of Citium's Ethical Paradoxes

Seneca's *Moral Letters* reveal two radically different approaches to arguing about the good. The first is that of Zeno of Citium. Seneca reports and criticizes an argument of Zeno of Citium's that death is not bad. As Malcolm Schofield has pointed out, Seneca draws a close

connection between this argument and the context of dialectical argumentation through question and answer. I argue that a further Stoic argument, that only that which is honourable is good, should likewise be taken as dialectical in this way; the argument is much better as an attempt to argue in a dialectical context than as something like a demonstration, because in a dialectical context, the acceptability conditions for premises are (rightly) far more relaxed. By distinguishing between the dialectical roles of questioner and answerer, I argue that these Stoic arguments may never have been intended to ground claims to knowledge, but rather only to reveal an opponent's ignorance; for it is as a questioner that one poses such arguments, but as an answerer that one establishes oneself as a knower.

Of the two arguments of Zeno of Citium that Seneca reports, one of them is about the goodness of things, the other is not. Since, in understanding Seneca's criticisms of Zeno, I will be drawing on his discussion of both syllogisms, I will mention them both here.¹⁹ The first is about drunkenness, and runs as follows:

1. You wouldn't trust a secret to a drunken person
2. You would trust a secret to a wise person

Therefore,

3. A wise person is not a drunken person²⁰

This syllogism is about whether the wise person drinks, but it does not directly bear on questions of the goodness and badness of things. The second syllogism, however, does:

¹⁹ These syllogisms are part of a wider collection of syllogisms of Zeno of Citium, discussed by Schofield in his *The Syllogisms of Zeno of Citium*. I will not discuss the broader collection here, because the others are not about exposing false goods, or revealing goods.

²⁰ *EM* 83.9

1. Death is glorious
2. That which is glorious is not bad

Therefore,

3. Death is not bad²¹

There are clearly problems with each argument. In ancient times, people already responded to the first by raising a parallel argument showing that the wise person didn't sleep or die either.

²² The second is problematic on three fronts: first, because it at best shows that some deaths are not bad; second, because there is room to doubt the second premise – we might argue, for example, that the glorious is admirable precisely because it involves sacrifice on the part of the person doing the glorious thing; thirdly, we are rightly suspicious of the notion of a glorious death being an outdated and imperialistic notion fitting of war-mongering people. That is not to say it is no longer with us, but simply that we should, by now, know better than that, and we have no business propounding arguments that perpetuate and strengthen the hold of such notions.

I will argue later that Seneca most likely shared the final concern about the argument about death. But the other concerns are by and large mitigated by the observation that these arguments were designed to take place in the context of a dialectical exchange.

²¹ *EM* 82.9

²² Schofield's treatment of this parallel and ancient responses to it is more than adequate, so I won't rehearse familiar ground here.

The first relevant feature of a dialectical exchange is that the answerer must accept those premises that seem to be the case to the people they are representing.²³ This is a low standard. The premises neither need to be true, nor does the answerer need to be able to account for the seeming in any way. They do not, for example, have to be able to explain how they know that something is true or false to accept or reject it: it is enough that it should simply seem that way to them. This helps explain why the syllogism on death is a good dialectical argument: it may not be true that what is glorious is not bad, and it may also be something that we would not be willing to say we knew, because of the uncertainty. For this reason, the argument would be bad if we were in a context where we could only assert things that we knew; but in a dialectical exchange, we must assert what we believe.

That the arguments were designed for use in dialectical exchanges we see from Seneca's criticism of Zeno's syllogism:

Members of our school would like Zeno's line of questioning to seem true, the other, which is set against it, false and deceptive. I however do not submit this matter to the dialectical law and to those knots of a thoroughly outdated skill: I think we should throw out this whole genus, in which the person who is being asked believes himself to be limited, and driven to a confession responds one way, while believing another. On behalf of the truth it is necessary to act more straightforwardly, against fear more bravely. We

²³ Dialectical answerers can speak on their own behalf, but sometimes speak on behalf of particular thinkers, and sometimes on behalf groups of people, e.g the many. See Aristotle's *Topics* 159b16–33.

should set free and expand those things themselves which are concealed by these things, in order to persuade, not in order to impose.²⁴ (*EM* 82.19-20)

We will return to the details of Seneca's objection in the next section. For now, what I want to draw out of this passage is Seneca's characterisation of the purpose and context of Zeno's argument. Seneca mentions the 'dialectical law', pointing to the practice of arguing one-on-one with question and answer. He points out that the arguments have the effect of making an opponent feel 'hemmed in' and 'driven to a confession'. To put it less negatively, Zeno's arguments are designed to bring about refutation in a dialectical context.²⁵

If that is the right way to understand Zeno's arguments, then they have a certain force. Zeno need not have claimed to have known that the premises of the arguments were true; it simply needed to be the case that his opponents all believed *something* that made them possible to refute. Conversely, Zeno himself, to be convincing, had to avoid conceding premises that would lead to him being refuted. He could then claim, in arguing with others, that his position was the only position that was irrefutable, while his opponents were all, in one way or another, able to be refuted.

²⁴ Nostri quidem videri volunt Zenonis interrogationem veram esse, fallacem autem alteram et falsam quae illi opponitur. Ego non redigo ista ad legem dialecticam et ad illos artificii veteranosissimos nodos: totum genus istuc exturbandum iudico, quo circumscribi se, qui interrogatur, existimat et ad confessionem perductus aliud respondet, aliud putat. Pro veritate simplicius agendum est, contra metum fortius. Haec ipsa, quae voluntur ab illis, solvere malim et expandere, ut persuadeam, non ut inponam.

²⁵ The Stoics meant by dialectic something similar to what the word meant in Plato and Aristotle: that is, an ability for succeeding in question and answer discussion. This definition is given at *DL VIII.42*. For a good discussion of Stoic definitions of dialectic, see Anthony Long's "Dialectic and the Stoic Sage". Of course, Dialectic for the Stoic also meant the science of what is true and what is false, and the connection between this science and dialectical games is important for Stoics. Seneca clearly sees them as connected, as the Stoics he criticizes are drawing on the tools of this science.

Importantly, this means that the premises of Zeno's arguments need not be premises he believed, or was justified in believing. They, rather, needed to be premises that his opponents would accept. And, equally importantly, his arguments needn't secure conviction from everyone they were presented to. Zeno may well have used different arguments with different interlocutors. The important thing was not to have one argument that would work on each interlocutor, but rather, for each interlocutor, to have at least one argument that would work. Furthermore, the arguments needn't work by changing an opponent's mind directly. Rather, they could work by revealing to an opponent that their thoughts on the matter needed more consideration. The observation that changing their opinion on the matter in question was the only way to avoid refutation could have been crucial.

That the truth of the arguments' premises was not of the greatest concern to the Stoics is reflected in Seneca's criticism. Seneca argued that one premise of Zeno's argument on drunkenness was false. Taking the premise to mean "you wouldn't trust a secret to a person who was frequently drunk", Seneca constructs a list of people with drinking problems who were perfectly reasonable guardians of secrets. It is somewhat difficult to tell whether Seneca thought the Stoics presenting the argument were fully aware of the falsity of the premise, but it's clear that he thought they could work it out easily enough. He instructs them:

let everyone now name to themselves people whom they are ill trusted with
wine but well trusted with words²⁶ (*EM* 83.13)

²⁶ *Sibi quisque nunc nominet eos, quibus scit et vinum male credi et sermonem bene*

Suggesting that a moment's reflection would be enough to see that the premise of this argument was false. And, more clearly, slightly later, he states:

How much better it is to plainly criticize drunkenness and outline its vices²⁷

(*EM* 83.17)

The criticism here is not that the Stoics have failed to be sufficiently careful to argue from what is true about drunkenness. Rather, it is that they have been too little open [*aperte*]. This language suggests that Seneca understood the syllogism about drunkenness as knowingly exploiting an inconsistency in an interlocutor's beliefs, rather than arguing from what the proponent of the argument believed to be true.

It is probably in line with this understanding of Stoic argumentation that it is necessary to understand Cato's argument in *De Fin*:

Everything that is good is praiseworthy; what is praiseworthy is fine;
therefore what is good, is fine. Does this conclusion seem sufficient? Of
course; because it follows from those two, which were conceded, and in
which you see the conclusion is contained. But of these two from which the
conclusion is drawn, it is customarily said that not every good is
praiseworthy; for that what is praiseworthy is fine is conceded. But it would
be utterly absurd that something good was not to be sought, or that

²⁷ Quanto satius est aperte accusare ebrietatem et vitia eius exponere. Notice that these criteria of *satius* and *aperte* are the same as in the earlier text criticizing dialectic: so we can expect to find in this letter not only how *not* to argue, but also how it is best to do so.

something to be sought was not pleasing, or, if this, not moreover to be valued, therefore also to be approved of; thus indeed praiseworthy; but that is fine. Thus it is so, that what is good, that is moreover fine.²⁸ (*De Fin* 3.27)

Cato uses language that evokes a dialectical context: “it is granted” (*conceditur*); “it is customarily said” (*dici solet*)

The chain argument would then be reconstructed into the following series of dialectical questions:

1. Is what is good to be sought?²⁹
2. Is what is to be sought pleasing?
3. Is what is pleasing to be approved of?
4. Is what is approved of to be praiseworthy?
5. Is what is praiseworthy fine?

²⁸ Quod est bonum, omne laudabile est; quod autem laudabile est, omne est honestum; bonum igitur quod est, honestum est. satisne hoc conclusum videtur? certe; quod enim efficiebatur ex iis duobus, quae erant sumpta, in eo vides esse conclusum. duorum autem e quibus effecta conclusio est contra superius dici solet non omne bonum esse laudabile; nam quod laudabile sit honestum esse conceditur. illud autem perabsurdum, bonum esse aliquid quod non expetendum sit, aut expetendum quod non placens, aut, si id, non etiam diligendum; ergo et probandum; ita etiam laudabile; id autem honestum. ita fit ut quod bonum sit id etiam honestum sit.

²⁹ If we are going to question the argument, this premise is almost certainly the place to do it. We would introduce a distinction between *prima facie* choiceworthy and choiceworthy *all things considered*. What is good for me is *prima facie* choiceworthy for me, but may not be choiceworthy for me *all things considered*, because, for example, it might be unjust for me to choose it, or if the cost of choosing it might be too high. The Stoics, I think, will respond to this by saying to take the term as meaning simply *prima facie* choiceworthy. But they will say that to be *prima facie* choiceworthy, there must be real, and not merely apparent, gains in choosing it. It can't be that *on inspection* it turns out not to count in favour of the decision, but rather against it.

When we shift the argument from declarative form into dialectical form, its force becomes more apparent. Consider the premises in declarative form:

1. What is good is to be sought.
2. What is sought is pleasing.
3. What is pleasing is to be approved of.
4. What is to be approved of is worthy of praise.
5. What is worthy of praise is fine.

In each case, the sentences make universal statements about value. The statements sound relatively plausible, but they also sound like the sort of thing that we would expect someone to demonstrate. In a dialectical exchange we must choose whether to answer either ‘yes’ or ‘no’, and it is not allowed to say ‘I don’t know’. Furthermore, in such an exchange we do not want to look like we are a stubborn interlocutor and merely maintaining a position to the hilt. When Cato’s argument is turned into a series of dialectical questions, it seems much more forceful.

What underpins this seeming? It is a difference in the presumed purpose of argumentation. When the argument is put in declarative form, the point appears to be to provide justification of the sort that might underwrite our knowledge of the conclusion. But if it is to do so, we must accept the argument only when we think we know that the premises are true. In the case of the argument above, I believe each of the premises, but I do not think I know them; so, since I see the argument as an attempt to build knowledge, I reject it.³⁰

³⁰ One might think, so long as one believes the premises, one will be required to accept the conclusion. The issue here is in which contexts I am required to accept the conclusion. In some contexts, I should accept any proposition I believe; in others, and philosophical investigations are arguably such a context, I should accept only those propositions that I know.

But in dialectic, the point of the argument is not to provide the sort of justification required for knowledge, but rather to undermine a claim to knowledge. Here, the thought is that if you cannot defend a claim against criticism that starts from things you believe, then you do not know the claim. For this reason, the acceptance criteria for premises in a dialectical argument are different from those in other arguments: we should accept any premises we believe, whether we think we actually know them or not.

Cicero, in fact, criticizes the argument as a dialectical argument. In his reconstruction of it, the premises are different. He adds two premises: “what is good is desirable” and “what is desirable is to be pursued”, and then leaps immediately to “what is desirable is choiceworthy”.³¹ The reason he makes this leap is, I take it, because of his criticism: the argument, he says, is a *sorites*. While I can see where Cicero is coming from, I think his diagnosis of the argument is wrong.

The classic example of a *sorites* is the argument about whether grains of sand constitute a heap. It was initially a dialectical argument. The questioner asks “does one grain of sand constitute a heap?” and the answerer, of course, answers “no.” The questioner then asks a series of questions as follows: “if one grain of sand is not a heap, then is two?”, “so two grains of sand is not a heap. If two is not, then is three?” The answerer will wind up conceding that rather large piles of sand are not heaps. It works, because the boundary

³¹ The fact that there are two quite distinct versions of this argument also speaks of its dialectical character; the sort of thing preserved in a tradition of oral competition.

between a heap and not a heap is vague, so the answerer will never be prepared to say that, for example fifty grains of sand is a heap, but not fifty-one.³²

Cicero doesn't explain why the argument we're considering is a *sorites*. But we may easily see why someone might think this by considering a more modern version of the *sorites*. People are asked whether two different samples are the same colour. For each pair of samples, the difference is indiscernible to the eye. The first colour in each subsequent pair is the second colour from the previous pair. The colours in, say, the tenth pair of samples are clearly different from the colours in the first pair, although a line of indiscernible colour pairs links them. In the Stoic argument we are considering, the thought is as follows: each of the premises involves a property that is very similar to the previous one, but with a slightly more moralistic shade of meaning. Although our sense for differences in meaning is too rough to pick it out, once we go through a whole row of these near-synonyms, we wind up with two words whose difference in meaning we can easily see. In the case of the Stoic argument, Cicero says, people who don't already believe it won't be prepared to accept that everything that is choiceworthy is praiseworthy: the effect of this is to collect together several stages of the *Sorites* at once, to create a great enough difference that the distinction is clearly visible.

Cicero's criticism of the argument works only if the words are close to synonymous, and there is a gradual slide of meaning with an increasingly moralistic slant at each stage. The final step of the argument, which Cicero accepts, from something's being praiseworthy to its being fine is most likely an application of a Stoic definition of the fine: the fine is a praiseworthy good, that is, one that makes its possessor worthy of praise.³³ In the other steps,

³² Timothy Williamson discusses the *Sorites* in the first chapter of his *Vagueness*.

³³ DL 7.100

however, something different and more philosophically interesting is going on. In particular, this involves drawing a series of consequences of something's being choiceworthy.

The first consequence is that if it is choiceworthy, it should be pleasing [*placens*]. I take this to be a shift from the perspective of *wanting* something to that of being *pleased with something one has*. The idea here is that there should be a match between something being choiceworthy and it not being disappointing. The next two steps each introduce a further level of evaluation. If it is pleasing, then it should be prized [*diligendum*]. I take the point here to be that it is not really pleasing if, on reflection, we do not see it as something that is all and all worth having. And the next step is that if it is prized, it should be approved of [*probandum*]. This term has connotations of carrying out a series of investigations and tests on the thing, but it ultimately means that we should approve of our having it. Now it is, of course, possible to have something that pleases us and prizes us *to some extent*, but that we do not feel good about having, such as unfair advantages. But to the extent that we think we should not really have something, we are not be pleased with it, and we do not prize it: we regret it. So far, these are reasonable consequences of something's being choiceworthy: we should be pleased with it when we have it, see it as valuable, and approve of our possessing it. A lack on any of these things counts against something's being choiceworthy. But if it meets all these criteria, it seems difficult to see that either others should not praise us for our good choice (even if the praise is relatively low-key), or that we should not praise the object of our choice to others. There are objections that can be made here, but it is a serious philosophical argument, and not a *Sorites*.

It is worth mentioning two objections that one might make to see why the Stoics need not be impressed by them. One might be to argue that goods are indeed choiceworthy, but only defeasibly so. Pleasure is a good, which means we should choose it when there is no reason not to, but not at too great a cost. The reason a Stoic would not be concerned by this objection is that it sets them up to ask *when* pleasure is choiceworthy: when it is morally best to choose it, or at other times as well? Choosing the first option already concedes a good deal to the Stoics. Choosing the second option puts you in the position of claiming that it is sometimes right to choose a morally sub-par course of action. Maybe it is, but the dialectical power of the move should be clear. The second objection to consider is the idea that some things are good and choiceworthy but not sufficiently impressive to be prized: for example, merely surviving. The Stoics would question whether these things were choiceworthy, and certainly, in any case, argue that they were not good (and Aristotle would agree).

Cicero makes another criticism of the argument we are considering that confirms that the argument is dialectical. For Cicero argues that the premise, that what is choiceworthy is praiseworthy, would be rejected by all those interlocutors who held that virtue was not the only good.³⁴ This reflects that Cicero understood the argument as dialectical: his criticism is not about whether the premise is true or false, but rather, whether the right people would assent to it. Further, it helps us to see the importance of the intermediate premises in the argument: Zeno's opponents would reject that what is choiceworthy is praiseworthy, but Zeno was counting on them accepting the intermediate premises that connect choiceworthiness with praiseworthiness, thereby catching them in a dialectical puzzle.

³⁴ Cicero even asks Cato: Does it please you then, Cato, when you have assumed things that were not agreed to, to draw from them what you want? (Placet igitur tibi, Cato, cum res sumpseris non concessas, ex illis efficere, quod velis?) The language here is heavily dialectical.

One might argue that Cicero's objection, rather than being dialectical, is that the argument is circular. The idea here is that the premise *that which is choiceworthy is praiseworthy* is close enough to the claim *that which is good is noble* that to argue from the one to the other is tantamount to argue for the conclusion simply by stating it in different words. His claim that none of the people Cato is arguing with will accept it is a way of indicating the circularity. One way of understanding circularity is as a dialectical fallacy: one argues from a premise that nobody who disagrees would accept. This is my preferred way to understand it, and it matches the way Cicero attributes the fallacy here. But there are other ways to understand it. These ways require either seeing the premise and the conclusion of the argument as equivalent, or seeing the premise as standing more in need of justification than the conclusion. The two propositions are not equivalent: there may be things that are choiceworthy without being good (we saw in the previous chapter that Aristotle thought this about the necessities of life; the lesser of two evils may also be choiceworthy without being good). And one might think that some shameful or ignoble things are praiseworthy – one might argue, for example, that comfort with shame is necessary for surviving in a prudish society. This leaves the question of whether *that which is choiceworthy is praiseworthy* stands somehow in more need of justification than *that which is good is noble*; but if Cicero had this in mind, he owed us an account of why. The cleanest reading is to see this as indeed a charge of circularity, but one understood as a dialectical one.

If all this is right, then I think that we might fairly draw a connection between Zeno of Citium and Zeno of Elea, the inventor of dialectic and constructor of paradoxes.³⁵ For, in the *Parmenides*, Plato has Zeno explain to the young Socrates:

The truth is that the book comes to the defense of Parmenides' argument against those who try to make fun of it by claiming that, if it is one, many absurdities and self-contradictions would result from that argument. Accordingly, my book speaks against those who assert the many and pays them back in kind with something of good measure, since it aims to make clear that their hypothesis, if it is many, would, if someone examined it thoroughly, suffer consequences even more absurd than those suffered by the hypothesis of it being one³⁶ (*Parmenides*, 128c-e)

The point of Zeno of Elea's arguments against the thesis that it is many is to defend the position that it is one by showing absurd consequences of the thesis. Zeno of Citium's arguments work in a very slightly different way, by showing that his opponents are open to refutation. Just as Zeno of Elea thought that his opponents must respond to his challenges, if they wanted to, by solving his paradoxes, so Zeno of Citium can maintain that, so long as his opponents can't either unpick his arguments, or refute him more severely, his position will be the more plausible, even if it is on the surface surprising.

³⁵ On Zeno as inventor of dialectic see DL 9.25

³⁶ ἔστι δὲ τό γε ἀληθὲς βοήθειά τις ταῦτα τῷ Παρμενίδου λόγῳ πρὸς τοὺς ἐπιχειροῦντα αὐτὸν κωμωδεῖν ὡς εἰ ἓν ἐστι, πολλὰ καὶ γελοῖα συμβαίνει πάσχειν τῷ λόγῳ καὶ ἐναντία αὐτῷ. ἀντιλέγει δὴ οὖν τοῦτο τὸ γράμμα πρὸς τοὺς τὰ πολλὰ λέγοντας, καὶ ἀνταποδίδωσι ταῦτα καὶ πλείω, τοῦτο βουλόμενον δηλοῦν, ὡς ἔτι γελοιότερα πάσχοι ἢ αὐτῶν ἡ ὑπόθεσις, εἰ πολλὰ ἐστίν, ἢ ἡ τοῦ ἓν εἶναι

We've then shown that Zeno of Citium's arguments were supposed to work by drawing out tensions and contradictions in the beliefs of people who disagreed with him. The acceptability conditions for the premises of the arguments are that the audience should accept the premises so long as they believe them. Taking this understanding of his arguments allows us to reconstruct the argument above, that Cicero describes as a leaden dagger, which was almost certainly offered in a similar spirit, in a way that allows us to see more clearly what is compelling in the argument. Cicero's diagnosis of the argument as a *Sorites* argument seems wrong, but it helps us to see the force the argument had: in a *Sorites*, we don't know which premise to reject, and the same must have gone for this argument. Cicero can only respond to it by removing the intermediate steps, a response justified if the argument is a *Sorites*, but not if it is not. Because it is hard to see how precisely to respond to the argument, Zeno of Citium thought this was a problem for his opponents: they could be refuted, while he could not.

Section Three: Seneca's Critique of Zeno of Citium's Arguments

Cicero's diagnosis of the leaden dagger argument as a *Sorites* is intriguing. It's not obviously a misdiagnosis, though, as I argued, my ultimate judgement is that it is incorrect. If, however, the diagnosis is correct, then this is a particularly subtle and curious example of the *Sorites*. Furthermore, if the diagnosis is correct, then Zeno of Citium's arguments offer his opponents no real problem. If you continue along this line of thought, then before long, your thoughts will be much more about the *Sorites* in general, than this argument in particular, and you will no longer be thinking of the good at all.

Seneca thought Zeno of Citium's dialectical style of argumentation brought about such shifts in attention systematically. The effect of the arguments mentioned in the previous section is to turn one's attention away from what may or may not be good, and to such issues as whether the leaden dagger instantiates a sorites, or whether the parallel arguments to the syllogisms on drunkenness and death really do parallel Zeno's arguments or not. Seneca thought this was a major epistemic disadvantage.³⁷ He thought that simply paying attention enough to something in the right circumstances would enable a person to see how good or bad it was. Arguing with a view to refutation was therefore making a serious epistemic mistake.

Let us return to Seneca's critique of Zeno's arguments that we mentioned in the previous section:

Members of our school would like Zeno's line of questioning to seem true, the other, which is set against it, false and deceptive. I however do not submit this matter to the dialectical law and to those knots of a thoroughly outdated skill: I think we should throw out this whole genus, in which the person who is being asked believes himself to be hemmed in, and driven to an acknowledgement responds one way, while believing another. On behalf of the truth it is necessary to act more straightforwardly, against fear more bravely. We should release and expand upon those things themselves which

³⁷ That the criticisms of Zeno of Citium's syllogisms are about their epistemic shortcomings as well have been missed. Barnes, in his *Logic and the Imperial Stoa*, reduces this rich set of criticisms to the mere criticism that the syllogisms are unpersuasive. (17) Schofield, in his "Syllogisms of Zeno of Citium", draws out three critical points: the syllogisms are unpersuasive, they are inappropriate for a weighty subject such as death, and they force people to admit what they don't believe. (33) Wilson, in his "Seneca's Epistles", comes a little closer: he points out that the syllogisms are harmful in that they weaken a person's mind, but does not mention direction of attention. (77-8).

are entwined in these things, in order to persuade, not in order to impose.³⁸

(*EM* 82.19-20)

Seneca expands on this criticism slightly later in the same letter:

You see how straightforward and commanding³⁹ virtue is: what moral person can your traps make braver, who can they make more lofty? They break the soul, which is at its most stretched out and drawn into small and thorny matters when it is planning great things.⁴⁰ (*EM* 82.22)

The criticism has two parts. The first is that dialectical arguments extract a confession from people which they don't believe, and the second, which is found in the second text, is that arguments like these draw the soul into small and thorny matters. Seneca describes the study of the solution of fallacies and distinctions between words as 'small and thorny' matters elsewhere, so what Seneca has in mind is that arguments, like Zeno's, which aim at refutation focus the audience's attention on whether the argument was fallacious or not. In the first text above, Seneca suggests an alternative: we should set free and outline the things themselves.

³⁸ Nostri quidem videri volunt Zenonis interrogationem veram esse, fallacem autem alteram et falsam quae illi opponitur. Ego non redigo ista ad legem dialecticam et ad illos artificii veterinosissimi nodos: totum genus istuc exturbandum iudico, quo circumscribi se, qui interrogatur, existimat et ad confessionem perductus aliud respondet, aliud putat. Pro veritate simplicius agendum est, contra metum fortius. Haec ipsa, quae voluuntur ab illis, solvere malim et expandere, ut persuadeam, non ut inponam.

³⁹ Star, in *The Empire of the Self*, sees the term 'commanding' (*imperiosa*) as referring to the Stoic ideal of self-control. The arguments of the generals, according to Star, serve as commands that one might give to oneself. (p. 46) The soul, according to Star, governs itself through such commands. (pp. 37-8) It is unclear what Star thinks the content of the commands is: on my reading, it would be something like "consider death directly".

⁴⁰ Vides, quam simplex et imperiosa virtus sit: quem mortalium circumscriptiones vestrae fortiorem facere, quem erectiorem possunt? frangunt animum, qui numquam minus contrahendus est et in minuta ac spinosa cogendus, quam cum ad aliquid grande componitur.

What does Seneca mean by setting free and outline the things themselves? Seneca mentions, in contrast to Zeno of Citium's syllogisms, speeches made by generals to inspire troops into battle. First, he cites Leonidas:

"Break your fast," he said, "comrades, as though you will dine in hell."⁴¹

(*EM* 82.21)

As well as the speech of an unnamed Roman general sending his troops to almost certain death:

"You must go to that place from where it is not necessary to return"⁴² (*EM* 82.22)

These quotes must have appealed to Seneca in that each draws the soldiers' attention directly to the fact that they are going to die. Neither general tries to distract his soldiers. Instead, they confront their soldiers directly with the very fact that is difficult to deal with. Offering an older Stoic argument would have had the opposite effect, making the soldiers think about whether the argument was actually valid.

This procedure matches advice that Seneca gives Lucilius in an earlier letter. In this letter, Lucilius is facing a lawsuit which could have serious consequences. It could even be fatal. Seneca suggests a way of dealing with this fear:

⁴¹ 'Sic', inquit 'commilitones, prandete tamquam apud inferos cenaturi.'

⁴² ire, commilitones, illo necesse est, unde redire non est necesse.

But I will lead you to security by another route: if you want to rid yourself of all worry, suppose that whatever you fear will happen will come about no matter what, and whatever the trouble may be, measure it with you yourself, and estimate your fear: you will understand at once that what you fear is either not great or not long-lasting⁴³ (*EM* 24.1–2)

And he explains further:

We must remove masks not so much from people but from things, and return to them their own faces⁴⁴ (*EM* 24.13)

Seneca's advice, then, is to consider death and dying as directly as possible.⁴⁵ It is by doing so that we will remove its mask. His most serious criticism of Zeno of Citium's arguments is that they prevent us from doing exactly this: they draw our mind into the question of whether, for example, the leaden dagger argument instantiates the *Sorites* paradox, or whether the parallel arguments undermine Zeno's syllogisms. Time we spend thinking about such matters is time that we are not thinking about death, or about the good.

⁴³ Sed ego alia te ad securitatem via ducam: si vis omnem sollicitudinem exuere, quicquid vereris ne eveniat, eventurum utique propone, et quodcumque est illud malum, tecum ipse metire ac timorem tuum taxa: intelleges profecto aut non magnum aut non longum esse, quod metuis.

⁴⁴ non hominibus tantum, sed rebus persona demenda est et reddenda facies sua.

⁴⁵ Considering future harms with a view to coming to terms with them is called *praemeditatio*, and is said to originate in Anaxagoras. For a brief discussion of the history of the term see Armisen-Marchetti's "Imagination and Meditation in Seneca: the Example of *Praemeditatio*": 103-104. Armisen-Marchetti treats *praemeditatio* as a technique that allows the reduction of pain by removing the element of the unexpected. This is how Seneca describes it at, for example, at *Marc.* 9 1-5.

Seneca, then, criticized the practice of asking questions with a view to refutation because he thought that arguments successfully used in such contexts drew a person's attention away from the thing under consideration, when what they needed to do was think about that thing as directly as they could. This was, however, not merely an excuse for avoiding using philosophical arguments, or for arguing sloppily: rather, Seneca championed philosophical arguments that had a virtue that we can recognise today; the arguments Seneca favoured encouraged considering cases from as many different angles as possible. In this way, they are similar in argumentative style to well-chosen examples or thought experiments. In the next section, we will see these arguments.

Section Four: Seneca's Attention-Guiding Arguments

Seneca criticized Zeno of Citium's argumentative style, but what did he suggest as an alternative? I will argue in this section that the alternative he suggested was to see arguments as *attention-guiding*. An *attention-guiding* argument ought not to be seen as an argument in the classical sense of a set of premises that are supposed to provide evidence for the conclusion. Rather, in an attention-guiding argument the premise is to be read as an instruction to imagine something, or perform a kind of thought experiment, and the conclusion is a claim about what you will see if you undertake this imaginative exercise. Attention-guiding arguments depend on the audience's 'seeing' what the arguer supposes they will see.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ An aspect of this idea that, for Seneca, philosophical argumentation aims at directing attention is a nice match with the idea that Stoic meditation is a process of visualisation. Philosophical argumentation would then serve to guide the visualisation. For a defence and discussion of this view of Stoic meditation see Armisen-Marchetti's "Exercice moral et maîtrise des représentations mentales chez Sénèque", see esp. 171-179. That *meditatio* is Seneca's substitute for dialectic has been argued for by Hamacher in his *Senecas 82. Brief an Lucilius*: 29-31. This kind of meditation may be part of

My main source for this understanding of Seneca's arguments is *EM 87*. *EM 87* contains several Stoic strategies for arguing about the good, applied to the example of wealth, which Seneca defends against Peripatetic criticisms. But before I turn to these arguments, a quick aside is necessary, into the question of whether Seneca gave the examples of the syllogisms as examples of how to argue, or of how not to argue.

The messages that we find in *EM 87* about the syllogisms appear, on a first reading, to be mixed. It is a sign that Seneca thinks these argument strategies represent good ways to argue that in the main body of the letter, he defends each argument strategy against Peripatetic criticisms with verve and vigour. It is a sign that Seneca thinks these argument strategies represent bad ways to argue that he closes the letter as follows:

Let us suppose we were called before the senate: a law has been brought forward regarding the abolition of wealth. Would we persuade or dissuade with these syllogisms? With these would we bring it about that the Roman people demanded and praised poverty, the foundation and cause of its power, and that it feared its riches, so that it understands that it found these among those that it conquered, that these brought ambition and greed and unrest into this most temperate and sacred city, that too much luxury signals the ruin of people, that whatever a people has snatched away from everyone can more easily be snatched away from it by everyone? It is better to

the explanation of how Seneca, through writing, generated 'grasping' impressions for his readers – on this problem, see Wildberger's "Seneca and the Stoic Theory of Cognition": 85-90. For a more traditional view, however, according to which intellectual exercises are not aimed at producing understanding, but at applying it, see Sellars *Stoicism*: 45-7.

persuade, and to overcome feelings, not to trap. If we can, let us speak more bravely; if not, more openly.⁴⁷ (*EM* 87.41)

Here we find apparently similar criticisms of the Stoic syllogisms as in *EM* 82. They do not constitute speaking bravely or openly enough. Furthermore, the syllogisms are called ‘traps’ [*circumscriptiones*], as in *EM* 82. Why does he defend the syllogisms, then, if he doesn’t think they are good ways to argue?

I would like to mention, and then reject, two solutions to this problem. The first is taken by Inwood and Barnes, and I will call it the rhetorical solution.⁴⁸ The key insight of the rhetorical solution is that, in the final paragraph, Seneca only describes talking in a particular context: the senate. According to proponents of the rhetorical solution, Seneca has rightly recognised that there is a difference between philosophically rigorous arguments, and arguments that are useful for persuading the public. If the rhetorical solution is right, then Seneca’s point is simply that the syllogisms in this letter are to be used in philosophical contexts, and different arguments will be needed in other contexts.

Although I think the rhetorical solution matches the ambivalence of Seneca’s message well, I do not think it can be the right reading of Seneca. For the language that Seneca uses to criticize the syllogism matches the message of *EM* 82 well, and the message of *EM* 82 is not

⁴⁷ Putemus nos ad contionem vocatos: lex de abolendis divitis fertur. His interrogationibus suasuri aut dissuasuri sumus? his effecturi, ut populus Romanus paupertatem, fundamentum et causam imperii sui, requirat ac laudet, divitias autem suas timeat, ut cogitet has se apud victos repperisse, hinc ambitum et largitiones et tumultus in urbem sanctissimam temperatissimam inrupisse, nimis luxuriose ostentari gentium spolia, quod unus populus eripuerit omnibus, facilius ab omnibus uni eripi posse? Haec satius est suadere et expugnare adfectus, non circumscribere. Si possumus, fortius loquamur: si minus, apertius.

⁴⁸ Inwood, *Selected Philosophical Letters*: 259; Barnes, *Logic and the Imperial Stoa*: 17

that the syllogism should only be used in philosophical contexts. Rather, the message of *EM* 82 was, as we have seen, that we should do away with dialectical traps entirely; they distract us from the real issues. It would be surprising if in *EM* 87 dialectical traps were back in, but just not in rhetorical contexts.

Another solution would be to say that the messages aren't as mixed as they appear, and that Seneca's overall take on the syllogisms is negative. In support of this solution, we could point out that, in *EM* 82, Seneca provides a careful defence of Zeno's syllogism about death, so as to target his criticism of the syllogism accurately: the premises are true, the argument is valid, but it's still no good, because of its impact on our attention. *EM* 87 may be the same: Seneca defends the Stoic arguments against criticisms so as to make it clear exactly what kind of criticism of these arguments he is making. In this case, *EM* 87 would be largely repeating the point of *EM* 82, just applying the same criticisms to further argument strategies.

There is, however, very good reason to doubt that this second solution is correct. In *VB*, Seneca has a virtuous person defend himself against a charge of hypocrisy: the virtuous person argues that wealth is not a good, but nonetheless is in possession of considerable wealth. The virtuous person in this example rattles off a few arguments in support of the claim that wealth is not a good, and these arguments are the same ones we find in *EM* 87.⁴⁹ If these arguments are good enough for a Stoic sage, then the use of them must be brave and straightforward. If this is the case, then the *EM* 87 must, in contrast to *EM* 82, be displaying a commendable way of arguing.

⁴⁹ For the arguments see *EM* 87.15, *EM* 87.12. For the Sage's use of them, see *VB* 25

The solution I propose is that Seneca doesn't take the same attitude to all the syllogisms in the letter. Seneca discusses seven syllogisms. I want to claim that the remarks in the concluding paragraph apply not to the first six syllogisms, but only to the final syllogism. If we read the letter this way, we read Seneca as giving the first six syllogisms as examples of how to argue, and the final syllogism as an example, provided for contrast, of how not to argue.

The seventh syllogism is as follows:

“Good doesn't come from bad; wealth comes from many poverties;
therefore wealth is not good”⁵⁰ (*EM* 87.38)

There is good reason to think that Seneca sees this syllogism as falling in a different class than the previous syllogisms. First, he claims that it is not a syllogism invented by the Stoics, but rather both invented and solved by the Peripatetics. Second, he claims that the syllogism is used by dialecticians. Third, the defence of the syllogism Seneca offers is half-hearted, and he refuses to deal with it thoroughly because to deal with it would be to enter into a discussion of words, not things. Antipater tried to solve the syllogism by arguing that poverty was not possessing a little, but rather failing to possess a lot. If this is right, then the syllogism's second premise is false: wealth may be made up of possessing a little many times, but it isn't made up of failing to possess a lot many times over. Seneca responds to Antipater as follows:

⁵⁰ ex malis bonum non fit: ex multis paupertatibus divitiae fiunt; ergo divitiae bonum non sunt.

I do not see what poverty might be, if not the possession of a little. We will consider, if some time there is great leisure, what the substance of wealth may be, and the substance of poverty; but then we will also consider whether it would not be better to soften poverty, and to take down the pride of wealth, than to litigate about words, as though adjudicating about things.

⁵¹ (*EM* 87.40)

By claiming that wealth is the possession of a little, Seneca rejects Antipater's solution to the syllogism. In this way, Seneca leaves the syllogism indeed as he introduces it, as "a knot, for you": he doesn't offer his own solution. But the rest of the paragraph is particularly telling, as he offers to consider it further later. The offer is, however, clearly meant ironically, since he immediately goes on to say that it would be more worthwhile to consider other things. Seneca's real criticism of the syllogism is contained in the closing paragraph of the letter, and it is to this syllogism alone that the criticism is directed.

Seneca, then, takes an entirely positive attitude to the first six syllogisms in the letter. This must be because he sees them as being different in kind from both Zeno's syllogisms, and from the last, dialectical, (and only pseudo-Stoic) syllogism of his letter. This is at first glance surprising, since the syllogisms look, at a first glance, to be of much the same nature as Zeno's:

⁵¹ ego non video, quid aliud sit paupertas quam parvi possessio. De isto videbimus, si quando valde vacabit, quae sit divitiarum, quae paupertatis substantia: sed tunc quoque considerabimus, numquid satius sit paupertatem permulcere, divitiis demere supercilium quam litigare de verbis, quasi iam de rebus iudicatum sit.

1. Chance events don't make people good; that which is good makes people good; so chance events aren't good
2. That which can fall to the lot of any person, no matter how base or despised they might be, is not good. But wealth falls to the lot of the pander and the trainer of gladiators. Therefore wealth is not a good.
3. Good does not result from evil. But riches result from greed. Therefore, riches are not a good.
4. That which, while we are desiring to attain it, involves us in many evils, is not a good. But while we are desiring to attain riches, we become involved in many evils; therefore, riches are not a good.
5. Things which bestow upon the soul no greatness or confidence or freedom from care are not goods. But riches and health and similar conditions do none of these things; therefore, riches and health are not goods.⁵²
6. Things which bestow upon the soul no greatness or confidence or freedom from care, but on the other hand create in it arrogance, vanity, and insolence, are evils. But things which are the gift of Fortune drive us into these evil ways. Therefore these things are not good

Unsurprisingly, Seneca claims that the Peripatetics reject the major premise of each of these syllogisms. In responding to the Peripatetics, however, he does not try to prove that the premises are true in the general case; rather, his responses focus on the particular cases of wealth and virtue. The general principle provides the perspective from which these are to be

⁵² 5 and 6 are actually Posidonius' recasting of 4. The thought is that riches lead us to do many things that are evil because they don't bestow upon the soul greatness etc, but rather create in it arrogance and so on.

considered. In the first syllogism, the point is to draw attention to a unity between the good person and the good in life; in the second syllogism, the point is to draw attention to the impact a person's character has on other goods, and the contrast between other mental abilities and virtue; in the third case, the point is to draw attention to apparent goods from bad sources; in the fourth, fifth and sixth cases, the point is to draw attention to the harmfulness of desiring apparent goods, and so to put into question the claim that they are desirable.

I will consider in detail Seneca's discussion of two of these syllogisms to illustrate my reading. The first discussion I consider is the example which I think gives the clearest indications of how the syllogism is to be taken. The second discussion which presents the greatest difficulties for my reading.

The first example is the second of the Stoic syllogisms: that which can fall to any person, even someone thoroughly base and despised, is not good; pimps and gladiator trainers have wealth; therefore wealth is not good. Seneca points out that the Peripatetics reject the first premise (and so he doesn't intend the syllogism as a refutation of them): they point out that the goods in literacy, medicine, and writing can belong to any person, and so good things can belong to any person.

Seneca's response to this objection is to describe, in clear and vivid language, an important difference he sees between virtue and the other things usually called good. The difference is as follows: the other apparent goods take on the quality of the person who possesses them; but people who possess virtue thereby become good. Seneca doesn't so much argue for this point, as illustrate it: he names some wealthy rich people, and then, about them, raises the

question whether their money made them bad, or they made their money bad. The answer is: they made their money bad, because “to give some people a dollar is just the same as dropping it into a sewer” – that is, you soil money by giving it to them. Seneca emphasises how virtue bestows on a person contempt for money, and describes virtue as allowing a person to rise above such things.

This can all sound like empty rhetoric, if we disregard Seneca’s points about the importance of paying attention to things, rather than words, and his criticism of Zeno’s arguments as drawing attention in the wrong direction. Here, what Seneca is encouraging his readers to do is to think about why virtue cannot be found among vicious people (because it makes them good), and what the other goods are like when they are used by vicious people.

One might respond as follows: the argument is no good, because what we ought to do to test whether money is a good is to see whether a deeply vicious person is better off with more money than without it. Even if we think they will be very badly off, if they are even a little bit better off, then money is a good. But Seneca is arguing exactly this: in the hands of bad people, money is actively harmful, and we see this by considering it in their hands.

Seneca’s examples have a prudish, prejudiced elitist overtone. He was a roman aristocrat and mentions two disreputable professions: gladiator trainer and pimp. Further examples include a eunuch and someone whose only mentioned ‘crime’ was performing oral sex. These latter examples are too heavily tainted by Seneca’s misogyny and puritanism to offer a charitable reconstruction.

It is, however, worth pausing a moment over the former two. To be a gladiator trainer in Rome was to feed people to wild animals, to force them into mortal combat with each other for entertainment. The people in question were slaves, not there of their own free will. It was to have as one's daily job the orchestration of enormous spectacles of cruelty. Seneca's point here is not easy to dismiss: for someone inclined to invest their capital in organising gladiatorial games, money might well be a curse; going out of business could be a real boon. Regarding the example of the pimp: a reminder, here, is necessary. Women working in ancient Roman brothels were very often slaves. And a woman could be punished for adultery by being forced to work as a prostitute. The pimps that Seneca has in mind were not facilitating transactions between consenting adults: they were people who used the power wealth gave them to buy people they could then arrange to be raped in return for money. Both the pimps and gladiator trainers Seneca has in mind are thus people who use wealth to perform extreme and severe kinds of cruel degradation. Seneca thought that the purpose of philosophical argument was not to meddle with sophisms, but to unmask things as they were. In this example, wealth is unmasked as not only a supporter and a helper, but as an enabler of atrocities. Seneca's argument is that among all the goods, it is only virtue that cannot become horrifying in the wrong hands – and the reason for this is that it cannot fall into the wrong hands.

The Peripatetic can reply to Seneca: what about flute-playing? Even in the hands of a truly wicked person, it is hard to see that flute-playing enables them to do anything much more than playing beautiful music. It seems to bestow some benefit to them – pleasure, enjoyment, a source of a little money to live on, but not enough to do great harm. I lack the requisite imagination to respond on Seneca's behalf, here; suffice it to say that the argument retains its

force in the case of wealth even if we are not yet convinced about the other abilities. Seneca will think that flute playing becomes a bad thing in the hands of a bad person, but his case against wealth's goodness doesn't rest on this being so: so long as considering money when used by bad people is enough to help people see its ambivalent nature, the argument will have its desired effect.

How, then, would one object to one of Seneca's arguments? Usually, we expect to respond to an argument by rejecting one of the premises, or claiming that the inference doesn't follow. But the argument isn't trying to build on things the audience already believes, but to draw attention to situations in which wealth's dark side can be properly perceived. Importantly, this means that the argument can be a good one, even if the premise is strictly speaking false, and the argument does not actually follow. But then, what room is there for reasonable discussion? Or, to put it another way, what would it take for Seneca to change his mind? The style of argumentation seems to invite dogmatism.

To object to Seneca on his terms, we would have to describe convincingly how wealth made even a terribly vicious person's life better. We would have to, somehow, show that our competing description of the role of wealth in a terribly vicious person's life was the true one.

I am pessimistic about how such a dialogue would go. Each participant's judgement of the role of wealth in a terribly nasty person's life will be heavily dependent on their experience, and their preconceptions about evil people. It is unlikely to result in disagreement or better understanding, unless perhaps it involves the trading of true stories and experiences; anecdotal evidence is bad, but exceedingly narrow anecdotal evidence is worse. But

imagining this dialogue brings to surface a discomfort I have in Seneca's approach: it depends on a view of the dramas and twists of human life, and the way character plays into it, that he does not and cannot adequately defend.

In Seneca's defence, it is worth saying that I doubt that ethics can really be profound, moving or helpful if it is not informed by a sophisticated, nuanced and largely correct understanding of human life and the role of moral choices and moral character within human life. At least in Seneca we find an attempt to bring some such understanding to the centre of philosophical reflection on ethics. Zeno of Citium's syllogisms appear to seek to shortcut such an understanding, giving the illusion that ethics can be carried out successfully without it, which is far more pernicious. If you share my discomfort about Seneca, you should share my discomfort about ethics more generally: it seems to need something that is hard to provide.⁵³

But to return to substantiating my claim about Seneca's approach, with respect to the 87th *Letter*. The passage of the 87th *Letter* where my reading fits the least well is the discussion of the third argument:

⁵³ This is more or less why Nussbaum argues in *Love's Knowledge* that it is essential that moral philosophy should be in dialogue with literature, particularly through the use in philosophical ethics of particular literary examples. I am increasingly sympathetic to her view of the problem, but I think the solution she offers is unsatisfactory. I do not doubt that the critical and engaged reading of literature broadens and deepens our understanding of human experience, but the use of individual literary examples in philosophical ethics doesn't seem to me to provide the material to decide disagreements about what life is like. Skilled authors can make the impossible, even the psychologically impossible, astonishingly plausible; and it is frequent in the writing of fiction to distort in the interests of plausibility. Reality is often too surprising for readers to accept.

Good does not come from evil; wealth however does come about from evil,
since it comes about from greed; therefore wealth is not good⁵⁴ (*EM* 87.22)

Seneca's opponents respond by saying that money results from theft and sacrilege, and theft and sacrilege are only bad because the bad consequences outweigh the good. Inwood argues that Seneca's opponents' response is circular: what's at issue here is whether wealth is good or bad, so you cannot assume, in your response, that wealth is good. But this is unduly dismissive: Seneca's opponents here are shifting the example to something whose value they think depends on its consequences. If there are things that can be good or bad depending on their consequences, then at least in these cases, the quality of the consequences cannot depend on the quality of the source.

This view was not Aristotle's. Aristotle was unsure what to make of goods that came from disgraceful sources. He discusses this issue in relation to pleasure. One possibility he considers is that pleasures that come from disgraceful sources are simply not good at all, but that some other pleasures are good. The other possibility he considers is that the pleasures that come from, for example, sacrilege, are good, but their goodness is outweighed by the badness of the sacrilege itself (and not simply by the resulting fear of retribution, human or divine).

The view of Seneca's opponents appears close to Epicurus' in *KD* 34:

⁵⁴ Bonum ex malo non fit: divitiae autem fiunt – fiunt enim ex avaritia: – divitiae ergo non sunt bonum.

Injustice is not bad in itself, but in the fear associated with the suspicion, that those appointed to punish such things will find one out.⁵⁵

Seneca's response here is to argue that if we accept this, then we must accept that sacrilege, when it is not accompanied by fear of punishment, is an entirely good thing; and that, if sacrilege is wholly good in some respect (namely, by being a source of money) then it is honourable in some respect, since what is good is honourable. These responses seem like a rather weak attempt at refutation: Seneca sounds like he's trying to trap his opponents into admitting that sacrilege can be good, or that it can be honourable: things his opponents would not wish to admit. The attempts are weak, because his opponents will simply argue, in the first case, that sacrilege is never free of fear of retribution, so it's always bad, and in the second case, they will deny that what is good is honourable.

The core force of Seneca's response is not in these arguments, but rather in his illustration of the upshot of his opponents' attitudes when he says:

However we have convinced people precisely that sacrilege, theft, and adultery are among the goods. For how many do not blush at theft, and how many boast of adultery! For petty sacrilege is punished, while great sacrilege is brought forth in a triumphal parade.⁵⁶ (*EM* 87.23)

⁵⁵ Ἡ ἀδικία οὐ καθ' ἑαυτὴν κακόν, ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ κατὰ τὴν ὑποψίαν φόβῳ, εἰ μὴ λήσει τοὺς ὑπὲρ τῶν τοιούτων ἐφεστηκότας κολαστάς.

⁵⁶ Quamquam sacrilegium, furtum, adulterium inter bona haberi prorsus persuasimus. Quam multi furto non erubescunt, quam multi adulterio gloriantur! nam sacrilegia minuta puniuntur, magna in triumphis feruntur.

Seneca's point here is that, in sacrileges committed against weaker nations by more powerful ones, fear of reprisal can be largely reduced. Wealth, however, can be gained in this way. The wealth gained is often considerable, and can well outweigh the costs in terms of fear to the attacking nation. Further, such actions were celebrated by the Romans: being a conquering general was seen as a noble position to hold. The example illustrates Seneca's point well: the generals are praised, precisely because the Romans see the wealth and power that come from these conquests as good. Seneca's hope is that careful consideration of this example will reveal that the money obtained in this way is actually undesirable, and not a good thing at all, in spite of the safety with which it is held.

Even if we agree that money gained from unjust sources is undesirable, we might disagree about why, so the interpretation of this example is important. Seneca reports some Stoics who suggest a metaphor for interpreting it: it is as though the money was in a jar with a snake. To get the money, we have to get the snake as well; we don't want the money at the cost of the snake, but this is what makes it undesirable. The money itself remains desirable. Seneca argues that this metaphor is misleading, because it's possible to take the money without the snake, whereas it's not possible to take the money without the sacrilege. I take it what Seneca means here is that, although the snake and the money come out of the jar together, they might later be separated, leaving something worth having behind. Whereas if we obtain money through sacrilege, it will always be money that we have obtained through sacrilege: there'll never be a time at which the money will be without its accompanying evil. Another way to put this point would be that money obtained through sacrilege will always be something we should renounce, whereas this isn't the case with the money from the jar with the snake. Seneca's discussion of the metaphor is supposed to focus our attention even more closely on

the example of the money obtained by states in war, encouraging us to consider whether we really think the states are better off keeping the money, now that the sacrilege has already been committed, or whether we think the money is tainted. In the discussion of this metaphor, we see again how Seneca's discussion is oriented towards providing people with the appropriate way of thinking about the goods in question.

The two arguments that initially seemed like refutations seem quite different after the example has been properly considered. For now they seem to articulate the key points that we were to take away from the example. The fear of retribution from sacrilege and theft can be taken away if there is a great enough difference in force, and we still do not want to say that committing sacrilege is overall a good thing. Furthermore, when we think of the money obtained from theft and sacrilege as something that it would benefit us to keep, it is easy to slide into seeing theft and sacrilege as honourable. And indeed, the Romans honoured the generals of unjust conquests because they desired the profits that these campaigns brought to Rome. It is hard to see that we can both see the money as worth keeping, and say that the generals' actions were unjust; rather, if we think the generals' actions were unjust, we shouldn't keep the money; rather, we should see it as tainted, and as disgracing us if we keep it. If we see it that way, we won't want to honour the generals with gratitude. Consideration of the central example carries the philosophical weight of the argument.

Why, then, are the arguments stated as syllogisms? The answer is that the letter is not only about wealth, but about finding fakes more generally. The major premise of each syllogism highlights a circumstance under which the true nature of fakes will become clear: in the case of the two arguments we have considered, the general advice is to consider candidate goods

when they are owned by bad people, or when they come from bad sources. Seneca's arguments apply not only to wealth, but also to pleasure, health, fame, and so forth; but they aren't supposed to apply as quick checks. Rather, the idea is to think through whatever you find alluring in these revealing contexts, and the idea is that this will lead it to shed its allure.

The syllogistic form of the arguments is potentially quite misleading. For it leads us to assume the arguments are being offered as some kind of demonstration. If we approach the arguments in Seneca's *87th Letter* in this spirit, we will not see their force: the premises, far from being obviously true, look likely to be false. But if we pay attention to Seneca's explicit comments about argumentation, and the tactics he uses for responding to objections to these syllogisms, we find that he did not offer these arguments in this spirit: rather, he was suggesting them as generalizable thought experiments. On this reading, the apparent falsity of the premises is not a severe worry: what matters is whether the thought experiments help us to see what Seneca wanted us to see. Even if we ultimately still disagree with Seneca, we can no longer simply dismiss his arguments: they are forceful demands for challenging philosophical reflection, reflecting the philosophical insight of the Stoa.

Section Five Parallels to Senecean Argument in Contemporary Philosophy

I have suggested that Seneca's arguments operate as prompts to carry out a certain kind of imaginative exercise, and that they are not to be evaluated by considering whether their premises and inferences meet some standard of acceptability. This might sound like giving up on the claim that they are arguments at all. I will discuss two parallels in which arguments are offered, where evaluation doesn't depend on the consideration of the acceptability of

inferences and premises. My claim is not that Seneca's arguments are instances of either of these parallel modalities of argument; rather, the point is to show that arguments can be considered from the point of view of their capacity to induce a rational change in belief, without considering premises and conclusions.

The first parallel example is thought experiments. In a thought experiment, a description of a scenario is offered, with the hope of moving the argument forwards. The thought experiment might be used to establish a substantive claim, show the need for a distinction, or to cast doubt on a theory or argument. Thought experiments are commonly used in philosophy. It is generally agreed that if thought experiments provide reasonable grounding for claims, they do so by drawing on an epistemic capacity: perhaps people's ability to make everyday judgements. The conclusions that people are supposed to draw from thought experiments do not inferentially follow from the propositions of which thought experiments are composed. The propositions out of which thought experiments are composed are often all clearly false, but it is not for this that they are bad thought experiments.⁵⁷

The use of thought experiments in philosophy is subject to serious criticism. The most promising line of criticism is that we lack the epistemic capacities required to draw the conclusions we are supposed to from thought experiments. A relatively promising way to defend the use of thought experiments is to argue that thought experiments simply draw on

⁵⁷ In her "Imagination and insight: a new account of the content of thought experiments", Letitia Meynell suggests reading thought experiments as fictions, in the spirit suggested by Kendall Walton. The idea that thought experiments are fictions seems to me broadly correct, but it seems bad philosophical methodology to decide the debate in aesthetics about what fictions are and are not in an article about philosophical method. It would be better to simply point out that thought experiments raise many of the same philosophical issues as fictions do more generally. A comparison is Laurence Souder who claims that thought experiments are narratives ("What Are We to Think about Thought Experiments?").

our abilities to make judgements from day to day: moral thought experiments draw on our capacity to make moral judgements, and thought experiments about knowledge draw on our capacity to correctly evaluate claims about whether people know something.⁵⁸ This line of defense is open to compelling objections. Many thought experiments describe extremely unusual situations, which are so strange that we can no longer trust our everyday judgements to give the right answer to them. Besides, psychologists are, on the basis of a wide range of experience, of the view that our everyday judgements are not particularly reliable, which should undermine our confidence in them.⁵⁹

A potential solution to these lines of criticism is to restrict the use of thought experiments to the sorts of cases we *do* come across in everyday life, to require a reasonably large number of different thought experiments supporting any particular point, and to vary the details in thought experiments to correct for responsiveness to irrelevant aspects of them.⁶⁰ In this regard, Seneca has many strengths: so far as possible, he uses real historical examples; he calls on his readers to provide examples from their own experience; and he never gives just one example, but many. Seneca does a fair to reasonable job of mitigating the weaknesses of arguments that ultimately depend on the audience's ability to respond correctly to a described scenario.

I do not want to claim that Seneca's arguments are thought experiments. Seneca's arguments are prompts to carry out imaginative exercises that will help his readers gain insights.

⁵⁸ This is, for example, how Timothy Williamson defends thought experiments in *The Philosophy of Philosophy*: 211

⁵⁹ Both of these criticisms are made in Edouard Machery's "Thought Experiments and Philosophical Knowledge".

⁶⁰ This is the approach to thought experiments Daniel Dennett suggests in his *Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Thinking*.

Thought experiments are typically portrayed as relatively detailed descriptions of often fanciful situations. The precise case given is supposed to yield the requisite judgement. Seneca's arguments are simply too terse to be easily understood as thought experiments. Even when he elaborates examples, the precise choice of example is relatively unimportant: it's a guide to the sort of thing the reader is supposed to supply from their own experience, and for this reason, is rather different from thought experiments. They nonetheless share the feature that they are philosophical arguments whose value is not to be determined by evaluating the plausibility of the premises and the acceptability of the inference.

The second example to mention is therapeutic conceptions of argument, according to which the purpose of argument is to free the audience from some kind of mental delusion. On the neo-Wittgensteinian version of this view, we have various automatic and unconscious patterns of thought.⁶¹ These patterns of thought might even go against our stated beliefs. These patterns of thought are called 'philosophical pictures', and proponents of this position argue that they are embedded in our language. The philosophical pictures we have are useful most of the time, but we have a tendency to extend them too far: for example, we tend to think of things as existing in a place, and we erroneously extend this idea to numbers or minds. Philosophical arguments, on this view, should bring these philosophical pictures, and our abuses of them, to the surface, and guide us either to use better pictures, or at least use the ones we have more carefully. According to this conception of philosophy, a philosophical argument might work by offering a better metaphor or way of thinking about things.⁶²

⁶¹ I make no claim as to how well this captures Wittgenstein's own view of how philosophy should work, and why it is necessary.

⁶² This is how Eugen Fisher describes his project in *Philosophical Delusion and its Therapy*.

I am certainly not arguing that we should read Seneca as a neo-Wittgensteinian. The idea that philosophical puzzles arise from modes of thinking implicit in our language, and that philosophy's sole purpose is to put these puzzles to rest, is not to be found in Seneca. Seneca thought that specifically philosophical knowledge, which would help us to live a morally good life, could be achieved through philosophical reflection, and would have found neo-Wittgensteinians disappointingly unambitious. Nevertheless, there is something in Seneca reminiscent of the idea that philosophical arguments serve to correct faulty patterns of thought. His arguments in *EM* 87, on my reading, are a template for how to build up a much fuller mental picture of apparent goods, a picture on which they are likely enough to no longer appear to be goods at all. The idea is that going through this imaginative exercise will bring you closer by far to a true understanding of the goodness and badness of things. As with the neo-Wittgensteinians, Seneca's arguments value depends less on their capacity to prove that something is the case, and more on the improvement of the audience's way of thinking.

Section Six: A Return to Zeno's Syllogism on Death

I have argued that the difference between the syllogisms in *EM* 87 and Zeno's syllogism on death in *EM* 82 is the spirit in which they are offered. In this section I consider the possibility that Zeno's syllogism on death in *EM* 82 could have been offered in a similar spirit, as a prompt to philosophical reflection. I argue that Zeno's syllogism is in fact ill-adapted to such use.⁶³

⁶³ In saying this, I am disagreeing with Barnes' position at *Logic and the Imperial Stoa: 18*, which is that the difference between the syllogism in *EM* 82 and those in *EM* 87 is simply the use to which they are put. On my reading, Seneca thought that the syllogism in *EM* 82 could not be put to good use.

I have argued that Seneca's syllogisms in *EM* 87 are designed to guide an imaginative practice. But couldn't the syllogism in *EM* 82 be taken in the same way? The major premise "what is glorious is not bad" could be taken, in the way I am suggesting, as roughly the instruction: if you think something is bad, see whether it can be glorious; imagine as best you can glorious instances of it, and see if you still think it is bad. And, after all, Seneca instructs Lucilius in *EM* 24 to consider the deaths of good people, so wouldn't the syllogism in *EM* 82 fit in well with Seneca's advice on how to deal with the fear of death?

The answer, I think, is that it would not. The key is the word "glorious" (*gloriosus*). This term is used ambiguously by Seneca. Sometimes, it really is used to attribute a good property to something, such as at *EM* 104.23: "so [nature has given] us a glorious and lofty spirit".⁶⁴ But at *EM* 95.30, Seneca uses the term rather sarcastically: "what about war and the glorious evil (*gloriosum scelus*) of slaughtering whole peoples?"⁶⁵ This suggests that Seneca's view of what is glorious is at odds with what he sees as the mainstream Roman view. The mainstream Roman view is bound up closely with military achievements, achievements which Seneca quite rightly scorned.⁶⁶ The problem with this is that instructing people to think about glorious deaths would lead them to think about deaths that were *gloriosus* in the more mainstream meaning, that is, deaths on the battlefield: these are not the kind of deaths that Seneca has in mind when he thinks about good deaths.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ ita nobis gloriosum et excelsum spiritum

⁶⁵ quid bella et occisarum gentium gloriosum scelus

⁶⁶ Though the mainstream use of this term is not entirely positive. The *Miles Gloriosus* is a stock character in Roman comedy, where he appears as a self-important braggart. The term *gloriosus* has a double-meaning: glorious, and boastful.

⁶⁷ Seneca implicitly criticizes the militaristic overtones of the idea of 'glorious' elsewhere. At *De Ira* 2.34, Seneca writes: what is more glorious than to turn anger into friendship? (*quid est gloriosus quam iram amicitia mutare*) And he subverts the connection between military success and glory again at *De Clementia* 1.20: nothing is more glorious than a ruler wounded unavenged (*nec quicquam esse gloriosius principe inpune laeso*)

The two deaths Seneca mentions in *EM* 24 are Socrates' and Cato's. Neither of these figures died in battle: Socrates died in prison, choosing to drink hemlock rather than to escape unjustly.⁶⁸ Cato died on the sidelines of battle, choosing suicide rather than a life under Caesar. Neither of these deaths facilitated the violent conquest of other people or increased the military power of the states they were citizens of. They are therefore importantly different from deaths on the battlefield, the deaths that are likely to be evoked by instructing people to think of glorious deaths.

It must be admitted that Seneca mentions the way two generals address their soldiers in *EM* 82, and considers their speech to be courageous. But it is noteworthy that the generals do not appeal to the possibility of victory, service to the state, or the glory of a triumph. Instead, they simply direct their soldiers to acknowledge and accept the fact that it is likely that they will die, in the hopes that doing so will encourage them to continue. The lack of an appeal to glory is even more striking in this military context, and thus the use of the example of the generals underscores the fact that appealing to militaristic values is not the way to combat the fear of death. One might say that Seneca is pointing to a kind of glory *in* military action, rather than a glory *of* military action.

In dismissing Zeno's syllogism as wholeheartedly as he does, then, Seneca not only rejects the practice of dialectic, but also the idea of encouraging people to think about glorious deaths to show them that death is not bad. Seneca's criticism of Zeno of Citium's syllogism isn't just that Zeno misuses it, but that there is no good way to make use of it.

⁶⁸ Cato's death is described as *gloriosus* at *EM* 82.12, but not in *EM* 24. But that doesn't mean that Seneca thought Cato's death would jump to mind if he told his readers to imagine a glorious death.

Conclusion: Aristotle, Zeno and Seneca

Zeno and Seneca appear to have agreed that an important goal of argumentation about the good was to find fakes. Aristotle did not agree. This disagreement shaped their whole approach to argument: Seneca and Zeno sought out arguments that would undermine something's claim to being a good thing, while Aristotle sought out arguments that would identify things as good, and determine which of two things thought to be good was better. This makes sense given the relative practical importance of lesser goods in their system: for Aristotle, only the highest good plays a role in decision making, whereas, at least according to Seneca, any attribution of goodness or badness to something would affect how a person made decisions, and potentially ruin their life. The result is that each of these philosophers developed highly different systems of argumentation, each reasonably well matched to their argumentative goals.

The historical claim that Seneca and Zeno focussed on exposing false positives, and Aristotle focussed on ranking good things to identify the highest good, is interesting in its own right. But stated like that it appears to bring out a narrow-mindedness in the approaches of these philosophers. I want to make a stronger, more philosophical claim, about the situation: namely, given their priorities, Seneca and Zeno were justified in rejecting Aristotle's argument strategies, and Aristotle would have been justified in rejecting theirs as well.

Seneca and Zeno were justified in rejecting Aristotle's argumentative strategies, because they were unhelpful in finding false negatives, and would bring about false positives. Consider the

Aristotelian *topos* that that which is similar to a good thing is also good. This is of no help at all to Seneca and Zeno in their project of exposing false goods. Furthermore, it could actually be harmful: accepting the argument may lead them to incorrectly conclude that something is good, when it is not. If Seneca and Zeno treated Aristotelian *topoi* as acceptable, they would be likely to be less successful at identifying false goods. They might be more successful at another project, such as making the smallest number of errors about which things were good and which things were not. But that wasn't their project, and once their project had been set, they were right to reject the Aristotelian *topoi*.

Aristotle didn't, of course, reject Seneca and Zeno's argumentation, because he never had a chance to. However, he would have been reasonable to do so. He thought it simply didn't matter if you falsely identified a good, so long as you had a robust way of ranking goods. Accepting arguments like either Zeno or Seneca's would have entailed a risk of failing to identify the highest good, while gaining nothing of practical importance in return. With his framing of the goal of the study of goods set down, Aristotle should have felt no pressure to accept Seneca and Zeno's argumentation.

The example of pleasure offers a particularly interesting case. It brings out what I am claiming, and what I am not claiming. For Aristotle, pleasure is not the highest good, but the best life is certainly a pleasant life. The Stoics disagree about this: they think that some of the best lives are in fact rather unpleasant ones. Aristotle would, by giving enough weight to Stoic argument strategies, quite possibly come around to their position, and this would be for him a practically important change of opinion. Although the virtuous, for Aristotle, do not aim at pleasure, people who find that they are making their lives unpleasant have reason to

think they are not living well, and to reconsider their lifestyle. The claim I am making is not that the choice of methodology has no practical consequences for Aristotle.

The point is, rather, that Aristotle's arguments give him an account of the highest good that is more likely to be correct than the Stoic arguments do. But it is also far more likely to make the mistake of being too broadly defined. The question that the contrast between Aristotle's arguments and the Stoic arguments is not just: do we think that mistakes about lesser goods are important or not? But further: do we think that it's a more serious problem to have too broad a conception of the best possible life than a too narrow one? How we answer that question will determine whether we prefer Aristotle's way of approaching the problem of the goodness of things to one of the Stoic approaches.

The contrast between Zeno of Citium and Seneca forces us to reflect on a different question. That question is what we believe the role of argument to be. If we believe that the role of argument is to expose a person's ignorance, then we will tend towards Zeno's style of argument. From the arguments I have seen, I imagine that someone holding that pleasure was good and death was bad would come away from a conversation with Zeno with their confidence rightly shaken, a state which might induce the requisite reflection to see the truth. I imagine further that Zeno would come away from a conversation with a Peripatetic much the same way Socrates comes away from his interactions with hedonists: his confidence unshaken. If we think, however, that the purpose of arguments is to somehow directly guide reflection, we will lean towards Seneca. If we maintain that the only useful arguments have premises that are already known, and provide reasons that justify believing their conclusion, then we will be drawn to neither. My suspicion is that many readers will fall into this last

category. These readers should be especially cautious when approaching arguments put forwards either by Zeno or by Seneca not to dismiss them as poor instances of arguing according to their standards, but of coming from a different understanding of argumentation and its purposes, and an understanding that is by no means obviously inferior.

~Seneca~

The Imaginative Stretching of the Imperfect

In this chapter, I will show that Seneca's arguments about virtue in *De Ira* and *De Clementia* exhibit a focus on finding fakes. I had not expected to find that this was the case. The asymmetry in risk between false positives and false negatives that explained Seneca's focus on finding fakes in the case of external candidates for the good simply cannot explain why Seneca focuses on finding them in the case of character traits. Why should Seneca think it was less distorting to his conception of virtue to leave out an essential virtue, than to include an indifferent trait of character, or even a vice?

When we look at Seneca's account of how we come to the correct conception of virtue, we see that, indeed, the asymmetry of risk is not an important factor for him here. The explanation is somewhat different. Our ability to conceptualise virtue depends on our ability to extrapolate from those on their way to virtue. Seneca thought we had an innate ability to the progress people had made towards virtue, but that it had an important flaw, which we needed philosophical argument to deal with. The flaw was that some vices would appear to

be virtues. The extrapolation from partial virtue will correct for false negatives, but not for false positives. Seneca's answer to the Central Question, then, is that "philosophical argument should help us to find fakes, and thereby compensate for a shortcoming in our innate ability to pick up on the direction improving people are heading."

Seneca calls the intellectual projection by the Greek word *analogia*. In *EM 120*, Seneca runs two different kinds of *analogia* together, picking up on two different antecedent traditions for understanding the term *analogia*.¹ According to the first of these two traditions, two things stand together under *analogia* when they stand in the same relation to two different things. One of Aristotle's more memorable examples is that evening stands in the same relation to day as old age does to life, so old age and evening stand together under an *analogia*.² Seneca, picking up on a claim of *analogia* that Galen attributes to Chrysippus, states that virtue is to the soul what health is to the body. Seneca is unclear about how far he thinks this *analogia* gets us; he moves on from it rather quickly, and the most it seems to deliver is a general idea of the sort of thing virtue might be.

The development of the second *analogia*, which picks up from a different tradition, composes the bulk of the text of *EM 120*. This second construal of *analogia* is found in Stoic texts about modes for forming conceptions, and involves either increasing or decreasing some attribute of a familiar thing to arrive at a conception of an unfamiliar thing. The key examples in the source texts involve increasing or decreasing physical size, but in *EM 120* what is increased is the consistency with which virtuous actions are undertaken: seeing people who

¹ This observation about *analogia* in *EM 120* is, so far as I can tell, new, and will no doubt be somewhat controversial.

² *Poet.* 1457b20–25

act kindly or bravely on occasion, we come to imagine a person who acts kindly and bravely all the time.

An essential step in the application of this *analogia* lies in realising that there are vices closely related to virtues, which could easily be mistaken for virtues. Realising that these exist presses us to examine the candidates for virtue more thoroughly, to differentiate the true virtues from the pretenders. It is in this role that we find Seneca exercising philosophical arguments in both *De Ira* and *De Clem*, and in the final two sections of this chapter I provide a classification of the argument schemes Seneca employs about the goodness of things in these texts, showing how they are designed to expose imposter virtues, rather than identify hidden or disputed ones, and arguing that the vast majority of them serve this purpose well, if correctly applied.

Section One: Conceptualising Virtue

In *EM 120*, Seneca describes how we arrive at the correct conception of virtue. The answer he gives is that we arrive at it through *analogia*. An *analogia* is importantly not a kind of argument, but rather a kind of mental operation used for accurately conceptualizing things one cannot directly experience. There is a point at which the *analogia* can easily go wrong: some vices are closely related to, and difficult to distinguish from, virtues: these could provide misleading starting points for an *analogia*, and so need to be exposed through careful examination. This suggests a role for philosophical argument in the study of virtue: exposing the vices similar to virtue.

Seneca opens *EM 120* with the following rather condescending words to Lucilius³:

Your letter meandered through many questionettes⁴, but settled on one. It desired that this should be explained: how the conception of the good and the fine came to us.⁵ (*EM 120.1*)

We find out the name of the answer soon enough:

Our school judges that the grasp [intellectum] of both the decent and the good is through *analogia*.⁶ (*EM 120.4*)

After a brief remark that the Greek term *analogia* has been sufficiently welcomed into Latin, Seneca promises to describe what this particular instance of *analogia* consists in. This description will take us at least until *EM 120.11*, where Seneca provides a summary of the process:

We grasped that complete virtue was in this person. [...] From what, then, did we grasp [*intelleximus*] virtue? His order showed it to us, and his appropriateness and his constancy and the agreement of all his

³ It is relatively obvious that Seneca wrote his letters to Lucilius with publication in mind; what is less obvious is the extent to which Lucilius' answers are fictionalised. In reading the letters, one very occasionally has the thought "well, fictional correspondents are obliged to write back..."

⁴ The reader is requested forgiveness for this neologism. The Latin *quaestiunculum* is very rare, being attested before Seneca only in Cicero, who uses it to convey fairly intense disdain e.g. *De. Or.* 102.5, so translating with a neologism captures the fact that Seneca's insult is rather precious.

⁵ *Epistula tua per plures quaesticunculas uagata est sed in una constitit et hanc expediri desiderat, quomodo ad nos boni honestique notitia peruenerit.*

⁶ *per analogian nostri intellectum et honestum et bonum iudicant.*

actions among themselves, and the greatness bearing itself away above everything.⁷ [EM 120.10–11]

Our grasp of virtue is through *analogia*, which will operate by producing the grasp of a person in who perfect virtue resides. This, at least, is what the remarks at each end of the discussion of the grasp of virtue that runs between EM 120.3 to EM 120.11 promise.

Although Seneca tells us that *analogia* has been welcomed into the Latin language from Greek, and therefore needs no introduction, its usage in Greek is complicated by the fact that sources attest two strikingly different uses of the term. The term springs from mathematics, where it means *proportion*, but the use gets two different philosophical extensions. On the first philosophical extension, two things are said to *stand under an analogy* [*kat'analogian einai*] or *be analogous* [*analogon*] when they stand in the same relation to different things. On the second philosophical extension, a thing is said to be *grasped through analogy* [*kat'analogian noeisthai*] when it is grasped through the increasing or decreasing of something already grasped. We will find both in Seneca's letter, though the second way of understanding *analogia* is of far greater importance.

The first extension finds many applications in Aristotle's work.⁸ In Aristotle's hands, *analogia* points to a four term relation of the sort as *A* is to *B*, so *C* is to *D*, the idea being

⁷ Intelleximus in illo perfectam esse uirtutem. [...] Ex quo ergo uirtutem intelleximus? ostendit illam nobis ordo eius et decor et constantia et omnium inter se actionum concordia et magnitudo super omnia efferens sese.

⁸ There is a good discussion of this use in Olszewsky's "Aristotle's use of *Analogia*". I have drawn heavily on this paper here.

that, because A stands in the same relation to B as C stands to D, A and C are similar, or the same. Sometimes, this is used simply to draw out similarities or identities as in the *Poetics*:

I call it analogous [*analogon*], when the second thing relates the same way to the first thing as the fourth thing to the third thing. For he will say the fourth instead of the second or the the second instead of the fourth. And sometimes they apply it to that which the thing being indirectly mentioned relates to. I say for example that the bowl is to Dionysos what the shield is to Ares. He will say now that the bowl is the shield of Dionysos and the shield the bowl of Ares. Or as old age is to life, so is the evening to day; he will then say evening is the old age of the day, or, like Empedocles, that old age is the evening of life or the sunset of life.⁹

(*Poetics* 1457b16-20)

Here, some metaphors work by similarity of relationships. In the case of evening and old age, at least, the relationship in question is clear: evening comes towards the end of day, as old age comes towards the end of life. Perhaps further: evening involves a fading from day to night as old age involves a fading from life to death. The identification of evening and old age is allowed because they play similar roles in two different places.

⁹ τὸ δὲ ἀνάλογον λέγω, ὅταν ὁμοίως ἔχῃ τὸ δεύτερον πρὸς τὸ πρῶτον καὶ τὸ τέταρτον πρὸς τὸ τρίτον· ἐρεῖ γὰρ ἀντὶ τοῦ δευτέρου τὸ τέταρτον ἢ ἀντὶ τοῦ τετάρτου τὸ δεύτερον. καὶ ἐνίοτε προστιθέασιν ἀνθ' οὗ λέγει πρὸς ὃ ἐστὶ. λέγω δὲ οἷον ὁμοίως ἔχει φιάλη πρὸς Διόνυσον καὶ ἀσπίς πρὸς Ἄρη· ἐρεῖ τοίνυν τὴν φιάλην ἀσπίδα Διονύσου καὶ τὴν ἀσπίδα φιάλην Ἀρεως. ἢ ὁ γῆρας πρὸς βίον, καὶ ἐσπέρα πρὸς ἡμέραν· ἐρεῖ τοίνυν τὴν ἐσπέραν γῆρας ἡμέρας ἢ ὥσπερ Ἐμπεδοκλῆς, καὶ τὸ γῆρας ἐσπέραν βίου ἢ δυσμὰς βίου.

In the examples from the *Poetics*, each of the terms used is something already well-known, but this is not always the case. In the *Physics*, the underlying substrate is comprehensible through *analogia*:

The underlying nature is knowable [*epistētē*] through *analogia*. For just as the bronze relates to the statue and the wood towards the couch and the unformed raw material, before it has taken a shape relates to the other things which have a shape, so it [ie the underlying nature] relates to substance, to the this here, and to being.¹⁰ (*Phys* 191a7-11)

This text is important background for the question in Seneca. According to Seneca, the Stoic conception of virtue comes through *analogia*. Here, we have an example of *analogia* being the way that something becomes knowable [*epistētē*]: the underlying nature can be known through *analogia* from more familiar things: it stands in the same relation to substance as materials do to things made from them, such as wood to a couch, and bronze to a statue. This is exactly the sort of work that we are expecting Seneca's *analogia* to do with virtue, and so the way Aristotle uses *analogia* offers a promising antecedent for Seneca's *EM 120*.

But there are other texts about *analogia* that offer a rather different understanding. These texts are Stoic, so for that reason at least must be considered seriously as candidates for the background of *EM 120*. Here is one text:

¹⁰ ἡ δὲ ὑποκειμένη φύσις ἐπιστητὴ κατ' ἀναλογίαν. ὥς γὰρ πρὸς ἀνδριάντα χαλκὸς ἢ πρὸς κλίνην ξύλον ἢ πρὸς τῶν ἄλλων τι τῶν ἐχόντων μορφήν ἡ ὕλη καὶ τὸ ἄμορφον ἔχει πρὶν λαβεῖν τὴν μορφήν, οὕτως αὕτη πρὸς οὐσίαν ἔχει καὶ τὸ τόδε τι καὶ τὸ ὄν.

Some conceptions [νοουμένων] arise through experience [περίπτωσιν], others through similarity [ὁμοιότητα], others through analogia [ἀναλογίαν], others through transposition [μετάθεσιν], others through composition [σύνθεσιν], and others through opposition [ἐναντίωσιν]. Again, perceptible things are conceived through experience. The things conceived by something near to hand through similarity, for example, Socrates by the statue; through analogia either by growth [αὐξητικῶς], such as a Tityos and a Cyclops, or by shrinking [μειωτικῶς], such as a pygmy. And the centre of the earth is conceived through analogy from smaller spheres.¹¹ [DL VII.52.4-53.10]

In this text, we find a somewhat different notion of *analogia* in play: this notion allows us to conceive of things that are bigger or smaller than those that we have actually encountered. Here, the similarity of relationship is missing in most of the examples: the idea of a Cyclops is obtained by growth [presumably] of a person, while the idea of a pygmy is produced by the shrinking of one. We might force the issue, somewhat, by saying that each of the parts stands under an *analogia* in the Aristotelian sense to the whole: the head of a Cyclops standing in the same relation to a Cyclops as the head of a human; and this sort of thought is presumably why the same word can apply to each. And of course in the example of the spheres, the centre relates to the earth as the centre of the smaller spheres relates to them.

¹¹ τῶν γὰρ νοουμένων τὰ μὲν κατὰ περίπτωσιν ἐνοήθη, τὰ δὲ καθ' ὁμοιότητα, τὰ δὲ κατ' ἀναλογίαν, τὰ δὲ κατὰ μετάθεσιν, τὰ δὲ κατὰ σύνθεσιν, τὰ δὲ κατ' ἐναντίωσιν. Κατὰ περίπτωσιν μὲν οὖν ἐνοήθη τὰ αἰσθητά· καθ' ὁμοιότητα δὲ ἀπὸ τινος παρακειμένου, ὡς Σωκράτης ἀπὸ τῆς εἰκόνης· κατ' ἀναλογίαν δὲ αὐξητικῶς μὲν, ὡς ὁ Τιτυὸς καὶ Κύκλωψ· μειωτικῶς δέ, ὡς ὁ Πυγμαῖος. καὶ τὸ κέντρον δὲ τῆς γῆς κατ' ἀναλογίαν ἐνοήθη ἀπὸ τῶν μικροτέρων σφαιρῶν.

Nevertheless, the idea of growth and shrinking is here put forward as central to the notion of *analogia*, while it is not in Aristotle, and is essential even in the example of the spheres.

That the modes of increasing and decreasing exhaust the use of *analogia* in this sense is attested in a parallel text in *M* 3:

Again something is grasped through *analogia* in two ways: either by increasing or decreasing.¹² [*M* 3.41–42]

Because this comes from a text describing Stoicism, there is some reason to think it is more likely to be in the background of *EM* 120 than the Aristotelian texts we cited. Furthermore, the idea of conceptualisation here is very close to that in Seneca's letter. It is not, however, unproblematic. The first problem is that, in the examples, what is at issue is the increasing and decreasing of *physical* size. Applying it to virtue would require extending this notion to other attributes. More serious, however, is the point that Cicero makes:

When notions of things arise in the mind, then it is either by something known through experience, or by conjunction, or by similitude, or by *analogia* [*collatione rationis*].¹³ The notion of the good is made with this

¹² ἀναλογιστικῶς δέ τι νοεῖται πάλιν κατὰ δύο τρόπους, ὅτε μὲν αὐξητικῶς ὅτε δὲ μειωτικῶς

¹³ Menn, “Commentary on Vogt”: 180 argues against this translation, by mentioning the contrast with *similitudo*. But it is contrasted in the text above with *ὁμοιότητα*, so I’m not convinced that this is a reason not to translate in this way. The idea of comparison in degree is very important in this text. Nevertheless, it’s worth emphasising that the translation *analogia* here is an educated guess, taken by comparison with the other lists. Part of my reason for maintaining this translation here is that the text appears in the index of *SVF* under ‘analogy’, and the translation ‘analogy’ is often used here. The text, if taken this way, could potentially cause problems for my reading, so taking on this translation is a kind of ‘worst case scenario’ for me.

fourth, which I have placed last. For indeed the mind ascends from those things, which are according to nature, and then arrives at the notion of the good. This good itself however is called and recognised as good by its own specific power, not by either adding to it or by increasing nor by comparing it to other things. Indeed just as honey, although it is the sweetest, is nonetheless in its own class of flavour, and cannot be sensed by comparison with other sweet things, so this good, about which we are talking, is itself to be greatly valued, but its value is great by its kind, not by its size.¹⁴ [*De Fin III.33-34*]

In this text, Cicero states that the mind ascends to the good by the use of *collatione rationes*, which here seems to be translating *analogia* in a list similar, but not identical, to the one cited above. The good, however, is not merely *more* of something than the things already according to nature; rather, it is entirely different in kind.¹⁵ This suggests that the *analogia* itself must in fact operate through some other kind of comparison, allowing it to discover something similar, yet different in kind. Importantly, the Aristotelian examples of *analogia*

¹⁴ *cumque rerum notiones in animis fiant, si aut usu aliquid cognitum sit aut coniunctione aut similitudine aut collatione rationis, hoc quarto quod extremum posui boni notitia facta est. cum enim ab iis rebus quae sunt secundum naturam ascendit animus collatione rationis, tum ad notionem boni pervenit. hoc autem ipsum bonum non accessione neque crescendo aut cum ceteris comparando, sed propria vi sua et sentimus et appellamus bonum. ut enim mel, etsi dulcissimum est, suo tamen proprio genere saporis, non comparatione cum aliis dulce esse sentitur, sic bonum hoc de quo agimus est illud quidem plurimi aestimandum, sed ea aestimatio genere valet, non magnitudine.*

¹⁵ Vogt, “The Good is Benefit - On the Stoic Definition of the Good”: 172, sees this as a process of ‘refinement’ of the preconception of the good. I agree with Menn, “Commentary on Vogt”: 179-80, that the notion of goodness doesn’t play into the beginning of the process, but rather we start from “things according to nature”. This is in contrast with Seneca, where we get a notion of goodness, albeit imperfect goodness, from which to start. As outlined below, an important contrast between Seneca and Cicero’s Cato is on the question of whether partial goodness is possible. Perfect, or true, goodness is extremely rare, and if only this is good, then we cannot start from a recognition of, for example, the goodness in something imperfect. But this option is available to Seneca.

allow us to understand things that are rather different in kind: for example, the underlying nature, or substrate, isn't simply more of something than bronze in a statue. Cicero is not very explicit about what the *analogia* is, but he does say it starts from things already 'according to nature'. Perhaps we come to know what virtue is by seeing other things that are according to nature, for example, the health of the body, and transferring this idea, by *analogia*, to the human soul.

The fact that the good is the only thing that has its kind of goodness speaks against inferring its nature by mentally increasing other things' attributes. But it doesn't rule it out: it could be that by conceptualising things according to nature in higher and higher degrees, for example, we fall upon the idea of the good, our conception of it being enabled by this imaginative 'increasing', though not the direct result of it. In this case, the point in the second part of Cicero's text would be that, just because it's by *increasing something* that we come to know the good, we shouldn't conclude that the good differs from other things simply by being better than them. There is a textual reason to prefer this reading: Cicero says that the mind *ascends* (*ascendit*) *via analogia*, but that the good is not to be compared to other things *by ascension* (*accessione*). The use of these two closely related words suggests that the same operation that enables the mind to reach the good cannot later be used to compare it with other things.

There are, then, two possible antecedents in Greek philosophy for an *analogia*. The first draws upon similarities of relationships: A and B fall under an *analogia* if A is to C as B is to D. If A the relationship of A to C is already grasped, the B can be conceptualised by applying

the grasp of this relationship to D. The second draws upon increasing and decreasing: A is conceptualised under *analogia* with B if B is conceptualised by *increasing* or *decreasing* A.

In fact, in Seneca's text, we find both. First:

I shall tell you what this *analogia* is. We knew health of the body: from this we thought there was also some sort of health of the mind. We knew the strengths of the body: from these we concluded that there was resilience of the mind.¹⁶ (120.5)

This is *analogia* in the sense that Aristotle used it. Virtue is to soul what health and body are to mind. And indeed, Galen attributes exactly the same *analogia* to Chrysippus:

For just as strength and illness were seen in the case of the body, and vigour and weakness and something in between, and in addition to these wellness and illness, good health and bad health", and other than these he lays down, one after the other: conditions, sickly things, diseases, "in accordance with this," he says, "some analogical kind to all these things in the rational soul is also grasped and named"¹⁷ (SVF 471)

¹⁶ Quae sit haec analogia, dicam. Noueramus corporis sanitatem: ex hac cogitauimus esse aliquam et animi. Noueramus uires corporis: ex his collegimus esse et animi robur.

¹⁷ Καθάπερ γὰρ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ σώματος θεωρεῖται ἰσχύς τε καὶ ἀσθένεια, εὐτονία καὶ ἀτονία καὶ τόνος, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ὑγίεια τε καὶ νόσος, εὐεξία τε καὶ καχεξία," καὶ τᾶλλα ὅσα τούτοις ἐξῆς καταλέγει πάθη τε καὶ ἀρρώστηματα καὶ νοσήματα, "κατὰ τὸν αὐτόν, φησί, τρόπον ἀνάλογόν τινα πᾶσι τούτοις καὶ ἐν ψυχῇ λογικῇ συνίσταται τε καὶ ὀνομάζεται."

This first *analogia* will not, however, bring us to the text that closes the discussion of the conceptualisation of the good: the point at which we can grasp virtue via our grasp of a perfect person. Indeed, if we simply removed the description of this *analogia* the progression of ideas from the claim that virtue is grasped through our grasping of a person in whom there is perfect virtue would seem complete. Seneca no doubt thought this first *analogia* was somehow an important part of the process, but his text leaves it completely mysterious what he thought we gained from this step.¹⁸ What immediately follows picks up the second understanding of *analogia*:

Some deeds kind, others merciful, others brave amazed us: at first we marvelled at them as though perfect. Many faults lay concealed in them which were hidden by the appearance and brilliance of certain remarkable acts: we pretended these weren't there. Nature commands us to increase [*augere*] praiseworthy deeds, there is nobody who does not carry glory beyond truth: from these then we drew out the appearance of a vast good.¹⁹ (120.5)

¹⁸ Menn, "Commentary on Vogt": 180ff. gives a suggestion that I agree with so far as it goes, which is that once we have the idea of mental strength, all that is left to do is to refute the idea that other things, such as bodily strength, are good. He focusses on a Stoic argument strategy I don't mention in this thesis, though I agree that it is an important one, which is that what can be misused is not good. This strategy fits in nicely with the overall approach I attribute to Seneca, and my reason for not mentioning it is that it doesn't occur in *EM* 87, or in *De Ira*, or *De Clem.* I hope that I have shown, and that this is interesting, that the Stoics in fact had a whole bunch more strategies they could use to defend the claim that virtue is good. But they can't use the strategy that what can be misused is not good, I think, to show for example that a virtuous person never gets angry, or that a virtuous person contemplates the cosmos. That is, they have to not only show that mental strength is better than physical strength, wealth, etc., but also to show what this strength is. And here, I think, the second *analogia* in *EM* 120 is essential, while the first is less helpful.

¹⁹ Aliqua benigna facta, aliqua humana, aliqua fortia nos obstupescerant: haec coepimus tamquam perfecta mirari. Suberant illis multa uitia, quae species conspicui alicuius facti fulgorque celabat: haec dissimulauimus. Natura iubet augere laudanda, nemo non gloriam ultra uerum tulit: ex his ergo speciem ingentis boni traximus

In this text, we have the idea that we see *partially* good things: actions that, for example, have the appearance of being brave, kind or merciful. At nature's command, we increased these. Seneca promised us an *analogia*, and, in the part of the text where we expected him to lay out what the *analogia* was, began talking about increase. The Latin *augere* is closely related to the Greek *auxētikōs*. Furthermore, it is this process of increasing, and its consequences, that will form the remainder of Seneca's letter, and ultimately lead to the conceptualisation of virtue, which was promised by *analogia*. Just as we amplify a normal person to get an idea of what a Cyclops would look like, we amplify the goodness of a normal action to get an idea of what a perfect one would look like.²⁰

The text shows that Seneca thinks that we have an ability to recognise good actions when we see them.²¹ Our ability is, however, flawed, in that we tend to think that actions are better than they are. But our ability involves more than simply recognising good actions; it allows us to focus on the *good features* of these actions, and so to have the appropriate things to *amplify* in the process of *analogia*. We will see shortly that Seneca saw the tendency to see

²⁰ Inwood (*Getting to Goodness: 285–286*) is bothered by this, describing it as a ‘cognitive bias’ and thinking that our amplifying the goodness of other people’s actions is only reasonable because ‘nature bids us’ to do so. In fact, though, given that the process of *analogia* is generally a good way of considering what *more* of something would be like, we don’t need nature’s intervention here, except perhaps to encourage us to use the faculty.

²¹ It is often said that Stoics are empiricists. Inwood (*Getting to Goodness: 271–273*), in supporting this claim, cites *DL* 7.52–3, *Aetius* 4.11.1–5, *M* 8.56–9 (*SVF* 2.88), *De Fin*, 3.33–4. In his “Preconception, Argument, and God”, Malcolm Schofield argues that “Stoic epistemology, as we have seen, is at bottom empiricist”. But in fact the texts provide an apparently contradictory range of evidence. I am following Scott Donald’s approach in his exemplary “Innatism and the Stoa”, in which he argues that the Stoics believed we have a disposition to form beliefs about good and bad things, but a disposition that must be triggered by experience. This is an attractive way to make sense of the texts. For another good, albeit somewhat *aporetic* discussion of the relevant texts and the issues around them, see Sellars, *Stoicism*, pp. 65; 74–78. Whatever the right way to read the Stoics in general, something like Scott Donald’s approach is necessary to make sense of what’s going on in Seneca here. Ilsetraut Hadot offers a similar solution, “Getting to Goodness”: 35–36.

actions and people as better than they were as potentially misleading, and that philosophical argumentation would compensate for that; for now, let us finish outlining the process of *analogia*.

The next text reveals the step that I take to be effected by *analogia*:

We saw [*vidimus*] another person who was kind to their friends, moderate to their foes, who carried out both their public and private business reverently and exactly. We saw that they did not fail either in those cases in which it was necessary to endure patiently, or in those in which it was necessary to act prudently. We saw them when it was necessary to bestow, giving with full hands, when it was necessary to work, stubbornly and firmly suppressing bodily fatigue with their mind. Moreover they were always the same and in every act through themselves, not only with good judgement, but conducted by reason so that it's not so much that they can act rightly, but rather that they cannot do other than act rightly. We understood that there is perfect virtue in them²² (*EM 120.10–11*)

I have cited this text in full, because I think this brings out the difficulty in it. Taken in the most natural and literal way, this text seems to say that we form our conception of virtue by

²² Alium uidimus aduersus amicos benignum, aduersus inimicos temperatum, et publica et priuata sancte ac religiose administrantem, non deesse ei in iis quae toleranda erant patientiam, in iis quae agenda prudentiam. Vidimus, ubi tribuendum esset, plena manu dantem, ubi laborandum, pertinacem et obnixum et lassitudinem corporis animo subleuantem. Praeterea idem erat semper et in omni actu par sibi, iam non consilio bonus, sed more eo perductus ut non tantum recte facere posset, sed nisi recte facere non posset. Intelleximus in illo perfectam esse uirtutem.

meeting someone who can act perfectly consistently. If there is any intellectual grasping that takes us beyond what we actually see, it's the intellection that this person has perfect virtue. The problem with this is that it suggests we need to actually *see* a perfectly virtuous person, and Seneca remarks that a virtuous person appears only once every 500 years.²³ Most people have no opportunity to actually see a virtuous person.²⁴ The second problem is that if we find out what virtue is by simply meeting a virtuous person, then it becomes difficult to see what role *analogia* might be playing. Wouldn't we, in this case, then grasp virtue through *experience*?

Inwood solves the first problem by arguing that, for Seneca, historical examples are an essential source of knowledge of virtue.²⁵ It is precisely because Seneca had to hand accounts of Socrates and Cato that he was able to conceptualise virtue: the records of these characters provide the empirical evidence from which virtue is supposed to be conceptualised. But, as Inwood himself points out, this is a problematic method, since the accounts that Seneca had to hand of Socrates and Cato were almost certainly idealised, so if this is Seneca's account, it is not philosophically satisfying.²⁶ Furthermore, and I think this is a much more pressing issue for Inwood's reading, it is hard to see why this constitutes coming to know virtue by *analogia*, rather than by direct experience.²⁷

²³ *EM* 42.1

²⁴ With the significant exception of Zeus, the cosmos.

²⁵ Inwood, "Getting to Goodness": 297.

²⁶ For a discussion of whether the Stoics thought Socrates was a sage, and when he may have achieved sagehood, see Brouwer, *The Stoic Sage*: 163–6.

²⁷ Indeed, Inwood states that "empirical means alone do not suffice to yield from our experience the notion of goodness which Stoic theory requires, not even when one allows for the standard processing techniques familiar from our sources", "Getting to Goodness": 299.

The solution I prefer rests on the observation that the Latin *video*, like the English *see*, can be used in an extended sense, to mean *understanding* or *imagining*. If we take it this way, then the idea is that the *analogia* enables us to ‘see’ a person who would do the right things with perfect consistency, by increasing the consistency with which they acted. In this way, we can see how those who were unable to ever meet a perfectly virtuous person were able to understand what one would be like, and we are able to explain why Seneca says that we conceptualise a virtuous person through *analogia*.²⁸

If we conceive of virtue in this way through *analogia*, why would we need philosophical argument to help us know what virtue was? For Seneca grants that humans have a natural ability to recognise actions that are good, that they meet people from time to time who are able to act well sometimes, and this is all they need to form the conception of someone who is perfectly virtuous. If the grasp of virtue is so fully within the grasp of someone with a fairly normal range of life experience and mental powers, why should we even argue about it? Certainly, some philosophers are interested in arguing about the colour of snow and the possibility of motion, but Seneca places himself squarely within the tradition of philosophers who see such arguments as trivial wastes of time: for Seneca, philosophy should help us live well, and philosophical arguments should help teach us to see things that are difficult to see. Seneca’s description of the *analogia* suggests that the nature of virtue is easy to comprehend, and so not an appropriate object of philosophical discussion.

²⁸ What we learn from this is that they have to disdain human concerns in order to act perfectly virtuously, something they can only gain from taking the cosmic perspective. This fits well with the account of the ethical importance of natural philosophy outlined in Stephen Menn’s “Physics as a Virtue”. How this idea of the role of natural philosophy in ethics is developed in Seneca’s *Naturales Quaestiones* is outlined by Gareth Williams in *The Cosmic Viewpoint*. Isletraut Hadot also emphasises this in *Sénèque*: 228–230.

The key text is the following:

I shall add what might seem astonishing: sometimes bad things presented the appearance of the decent and revealed the best from the contrary. Since there are, as you know, vices right next to virtues, and there is a similarity of the right to the corrupt and wicked: so prodigality counterfeits liberality, although it makes a big difference whether someone knows how to give or does not know how to save. Lucilius, I tell you, there are many people who do not give but rather fling away: I do not call a person liberal who is mad at his money. Negligence mimics ease, temerity braveness. *This similarity drove us to pay attention, indeed to distinguish things neighbouring in appearance, but in fact differing from each other by a great deal.*²⁹ (EM 120.8-9. My Italics, not Seneca's)

We find in this text a possible use for philosophical argument in the process of conceptualising virtue.³⁰ Virtues are difficult to distinguish from vices, being closely related

²⁹ Adiciam quod mirum fortasse uideatur: mala interdum speciem honesti obtulere et optimum ex contrario enituit. Sunt enim, ut scis, uirtutibus uitia confinia, et perditis quoque ac turpibus recti similitudo est: sic mentitur prodigus liberalem, cum plurimum intersit utrum quis dare sciat an seruare nesciat. Multi, inquam, sunt, Lucili, qui non donant sed prociunt: non uoco ego liberalem pecuniae suae iratum. Imitatur negligentia facilitatem, temeritas fortitudinem. Haec nos similitudo coegit adtendere et distinguere specie quidem uicina, re autem plurimum inter se dissidentia.

³⁰ Inwood (*Getting to Goodness: 287–288*) sees the observation of the wider pattern of action as separate from the recognition that a particular action is bad. This is not impossible, but I think what Seneca has in mind is something like the following: suppose you have someone who did something bad, but deserves forgiveness. Both a merciful person and a weak-minded person will grant forgiveness. But what the merciful person does is a merciful action, while what the weak-minded person does is a weak-minded action. This difference can only be seen by looking at the wider pattern. If Inwood is correct, then Seneca is thinking that we mistake, e.g. wrongly placed acts of forgiveness for rightly placed ones. But it's not clear how we do this.

to them in appearance. We notice that there are these similarities, and when we notice this, we are driven to pay attention and to distinguish them. This is difficult work, and Seneca's *EM 120* doesn't make it clear how this work is to be done.³¹ However, it is work of a sort that Seneca recommends elsewhere using argument to effect:

Why do you distinguish similarities of words for me, when nobody is taken in by them, except while arguing? *Things* deceive, distinguish them. Bad things are embraced as good; we choose the opposite of what we chose; our wishes fight with wishes, plans with plans. How similar flattery is to friendship! It doesn't so much imitate it, but conquer it and go past it; it is received with open and gracious ears and it descends deep into the heart, and precisely where it is pleasing is where it does harm. Teach me how I can distinguish this similarity.³² (*EM 45.6-7*)

EM 45 is one of the places in which Seneca develops his critique of dialectical argumentation, which he in this letter associates closely with distinguishing the meanings of words. In this passage, Seneca outlines what he sees as proper uses of philosophical argument, in contrast to dialectical argument. He emphasises that philosophical argument ought to focus on things. In one of his examples of this he says that we take things as being

³¹ This might suggest a way in which human development can go wrong, without being corrupted by the opinions of society. It's easy to fall into trouble by oneself, because the things themselves are deceptive, and we need sometimes to develop sophisticated philosophical arguments to save us from the innate deceptiveness of the things. For the claim that natural human development leads us to the correct conception of virtue, see e.g. Menn, "Commentary on Vogt": 177-178.

³² Quid mihi vobis similitudines distinguis, quibus nemo umquam, nisi dum disputat, captus est? Res fallunt: illas discerne. Pro bonis mala amplectimur; optamus contra id quod optavimus: pugnant vota nostra cum votis, consilia cum consiliis. Adulatio quam similis est amicitiae! Non imitatur tantum illam, sed vincit et praeterit; apertis ac propitiis auribus recipitur et in praecordia ima descendit, eo ipso gratiosa quo laedit: doce quemadmodum hanc similitudinem possim dinoscere.

good, which are not, and his other example is a particular case of this: we need to know how to identify false friendship. These ideas are very closely related to the ideas in *EM 120*, where we find vices masquerading as virtues: if philosophical argument will be put to use in distinguishing flattery from friendship, then it will also be used in distinguishing carelessness from liberality. And if this is the task for philosophical argument, we will expect to find the same focus on finding fakes in the search for virtues as we found in the consideration of goods more generally. We will now turn to the argumentation of Seneca's *De Ira* and *De Clem*, and see that this is indeed what we find.

Section Two: Arguments

My procedure in this section will be to outline the different strategies, just a handful, I have found in *De Ira* and *De Clem*, works I have chosen because they are particularly focussed on defending Seneca's concrete conception of a virtuous person against rival conceptions. In *De Ira*, the rival is the Peripatetic conception of a virtuous person, according to which the virtuous person will sometimes become angry. In *De Clem*, the task is to determine precisely how forgiving a virtuous person should be. What I want to show is that, in each of these cases, insofar as Seneca offers philosophical arguments, the strategies he employs in them are reasonable if we see the purpose of philosophical argument as exposing fakes, and not otherwise, for they will err, when they do, by indicating that something is *not* a virtue. This gives us confirmation of what we claimed in the previous section, that the arguments are indeed being put to the task identified in the previous section mentioned above, that of exposing the vices that lie adjacent to virtues.

The first strategy we will consider is *synergy with vices*. This is a rare strategy that occurs just once in *De Clem*, and never in *De Ira*, though there it is put to the vitally important task. Here is the text in which it occurs:

All good men display clemency and mildness, but they avoid pity. For it is a vice of a small mind falling to the sight of another person's misfortunes. Therefore it is to the worst people that it is most appropriate. There are old women and contemptible women who are moved by the tears of the most harmful people, who, if they could, would break them out of prison. (*De Clem II.V.1–2*)³³

The conclusion of the argument is that good people avoid pity. The argument takes two steps: first, Seneca argues that, because pity involves a small mind *falling*, it is most appropriate (*familiarissima*) to the worst people (apparently, elderly and contemptible women). And then he concludes that, because it is appropriate to bad people, it is not a virtue.

Abstracting from the particular case, we get the scheme that if something is appropriate to bad people, it's not a virtue. To establish the claim that something is appropriate to bad people, we consider whether the thing we are considering relates closely to other vices. If it

³³ Clementiam mansuetudinemque omnes boni viri praestabunt, misericordiam autem vitabunt ; est enim vitium pusilli animi ad speciem alienorum malorum succidentis. Itaque pessimo cuique familiarissima est; anus et mulierculae sunt, quae lacrimis nocentissimorum moventur, quae, si liceret, carcerem effringerent.

does, then we are to take this to be a sign that it is not a virtue. In the argument above, the connection is between pity and small-mindedness.

This strategy's goal is to expose things that are apparently virtues, but that are in fact not.³⁴ And it is a good one, on the assumption that we have some understanding of what the vices are. For it is true that, if a character trait depends on the presence of vices, it probably reflects badly on someone to have it, and is not something we ought to cultivate, which are good reasons to doubt that it is a virtue. It may, however, be that there are some strengths of character, necessary for community life, for example, that can only exist alongside weaknesses of character.³⁵ If one's aim was different from Seneca's and was, for example, to create a catalogue of virtues that would help you never miss something good about a person, then this strategy would not be one to employ.

The idea behind the second strategy, *clash with other virtues*, is the inverse of that behind the first one. *Clash with other virtues*, involves showing that a character trait is incompatible with central and important virtues. In showing this, we show that the character trait in question cannot be a virtue. The two strategies are of course closely related, but an incompatibility with a virtue need not entail a close connection with some other vice.

Seneca uses the *clash with other virtues* strategy to good effect in *De Ira*, where he argues that it is impossible to be both irascible and just. Here, he supports his use of the argument

³⁴ Because the vices are right next to virtues, doing this is also a way to clarify the notions of the virtues.

³⁵ Kevin Dutton's *The Wisdom of Psychopaths* is a book about how traits that are particularly suited to psychopaths can be useful for other people. Part of the purpose of Dutton's work is decreasing stigmatization of psychopaths. I mention it is an example of a project in which this scheme could play no role.

with two kinds of evidence. The first is through historical examples of people who have acted unjustly because of their irascibility. For example, he mentions Gnaeus Piso, and lists a series of unjust punishments he inflicted in anger on people under his commands.³⁶ The point of these examples is not that somebody who is angry will necessarily act unjustly, but rather to illustrate how the way we think when we're angry leads us into injustices.

Nevertheless, the argument through examples is not terribly convincing. A Peripatetic could simply respond that what had happened in the examples was that the people in question had become *too angry*. The Peripatetic position is that people should get angry in proportion to another person's wrongdoing, and Seneca will hardly be able to adduce examples of somebody who is angry *in an appropriate proportion to somebody's wrongdoing* who is at the same time for this reason meting out an unjust punishment. Seneca, who thinks that anger is by its nature out of control, will not come up with such examples.

For this reason, the second kind of support is more important. Seneca compares and contrasts the way *reason* evaluates somebody's wrongdoing, with the way *anger* does so. Reason "hears both sides", "takes its time to come to a decision", and "focusses on the case at hand", whereas anger "is in a hurry", and is "excited by issues hovering around at the outskirts of a case".³⁷ If Seneca's got the psychology right here, then the contrast is an important point for

³⁶ *De Ira* I.17

³⁷ This argument doesn't need to presuppose the possibility of psychic conflict. The extent to which Seneca allows for the possibility of psychic conflict, or maintains that it is impossible because he holds a unified theory of the soul, has been much discussed (two relatively recent contributions are Inwood, "Seneca and Psychological Dualism" and Gartner, "The Possibility of Psychic Conflict in Seneca's *De Ira*"). The reason the issue here is not about psychic conflict is that it is comparing how a person forms a judgement when they are angry, from how a person forms a judgement in accordance with reason. All that is needed is that the soul can enter an angry state, and that it does not act in accordance with reason when it is in this state. This is how Seneca describes it when he says "both affect and reason are changes of the soul into the better or the worse" (*sed adfectus et ratio in melius*

him: anger operates in a way that *undermines* its capacity to be ‘in proportion with the wrongdoing’, because it operates quickly and imprecisely. Such a source of action will need to be kept in check and tamed by reason, and will be an obstacle to justice.³⁸

This example shows the importance of understanding the operation of psychological forces for the use of this strategy. Examples can always be written off as a defective or imperfect version of the trait under defence (here, irascibility). What’s necessary is to show that the trait’s operation leads it into conflict with clearer examples of virtues. But if this can be done, the trait can be shown to be undesirable. Even if one denies the thesis of the unity of the virtues, it is hard to claim that a trait which is an obstacle to justice is a desirable one.

Seneca uses this strategy at least once more in the *De Ira* I.19, where he shows that irascibility is incompatible with magnanimity, and in *De Clem* II.5, where he argues that pity is incompatible with magnanimity.

This strategy is clearly aimed at exposing things that are merely apparently, but not actually, good. If it goes wrong, it will do so by declaring things that are actually good are not. One example might be, as in the previous section, virtues that only the moderately vicious can possess. It is also, again, possible that some virtues simply are incompatible with each other.

Generalising: in *De Ira* we find Seneca responding to Theophrastus in the following way:

peiusque mutatio animi est) *De Ira* I.8. This is compatible with a unitary, but changing, soul. Seneca discusses problems that arise with this reading, including how reason can quell anger, in *De Ira* I.8.

³⁸ This is the force of *De Ira* I.XVIII

“It cannot be the case,” says Theophrastus, “that a good man is not angry at bad things.” But by this argument, someone will be better who is angrier: but notice that on the contrary, the better person will be the one who is calmer and separated from feelings and to who nobody is hateful . (*De Ira I.14*)³⁹

Before commenting on the argument in this passage, it is necessary to clear up a preconception about Stoicism. In a famous text, Cicero’s Cato describes a Stoic doctrine which seems to indicate that, no matter how close to goodness we come, this makes no tangible change to our lives:

Just as those who are underwater can no more breathe, if they are not far from the surface, so that they can emerge at any moment, than those who are deep underwater, and nor can a puppy, who is just about to be able to see, can no more see than one who has just been born, so too is someone who has advanced a considerable amount towards the state of virtue is no less in misery than a person who has not advanced at all.⁴⁰ (*De Finibus III.48*)

In this text, Cato lays out in no uncertain terms that progress towards virtue brings us no closer to happiness, and our lives are not improved by getting closer to obtaining virtue. People can come closer to obtaining virtue, but this makes no difference: just as when people

³⁹ " Non potest," inquit, " fieri " Theophrastus " ut non vir bonus irascatur malis." Isto modo quo melior quisque hoc iracundior erit: vide ne contra placidior solutusque affectibus et cui nemo odio sit.

⁴⁰ ut enim qui demersi sunt in aqua nihilo magis respirare possunt si non longe absunt a summo ut iam iamque possint emergere, quam si etiam tum essent in profundo, nec catulus ille qui iam appropinquat ut videat plus cernit quam is qui modo est natus, item qui processit aliquantum ad virtutis habitum nihilo minus in miseria est quam ille qui nihil processit.

get closer to the surface of water, and when puppies get closer to opening their eyes, they cannot breathe and they cannot see, so is someone closer to virtue no closer to happiness. This is a striking claim, and one that frequently makes its way into general treatments of Stoic ethics.⁴¹

This is a doctrine that Seneca rejects, at least on the strongest reading. In *EM* 75.9-14, Seneca directly rejects this claim, outlining three classes of people who fall short in virtue. The first class are people who have rid themselves of all passions and vices; they are in no risk of slipping back, but they have not yet put their good into practice. The second class is people who have gotten rid of vices, but not passions: that is, they have no settled disposition to feel passions, but they still feel them on occasion. The third class has escaped the worst of the vices, but retains the less serious ones. They no longer fear pain, for example, but still fear death, and are no longer greedy, but still prone to anger. He concludes this categorization by stating that it is good even to make it into the third class:

Think about how many bad things you see around you, look at how there is no crime without an example, how many evil deeds are accomplished every day, how much is transgressed in public and private: you will understand that we have attained enough, if we are not among the very worst. ⁴² (*EM* 75.15)

⁴¹ See e.g. Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom*: 191; Annas, *Morality of Happiness*: 405-406.

⁴² Cogita, quantum circa te videas malorum, aspice quam nullum sit nefas sine exemplo, quantum cotidie nequitia proficiat, quantum publice privatimque peccetur: intelleges satis nos consequi, si inter pessimos non sumus.

That Seneca draws attention to the amount of evil around makes it clear that even the third class is doing noticeably better than the others. And that he describes them as ‘not among the worst’ indicates progression in goodness. This phrasing “*si inter pessimos non sumus*”, is certainly suggestive that those who are growing closer to virtue are better, or at least not as bad, as the others. But even if this is a slip or clumsy phrasing, and Seneca overall endorses the idea that the non-virtuous are all equally bad, he is at least saying that progress towards virtue carries some important consequences for how your life will go.

With this noted, we can return to Seneca’s criticism of Theophrastus’ argument. Is Seneca being fair? Theophrastus says that it is impossible “for it to be the case that a good man does not get angry at bad people”, and he wants to conclude from this that a certain amount of anger is good.⁴³ He doesn’t say that it’s impossible for people in general not to get angry at bad people, but simply that people who don’t get angry are suffering from some kind of character defect. Seneca’s statement that it follows from this that “whoever is better will be angrier” is overstated. But it does follow from this statement that, in some cases, becoming angrier makes people better, and this is what Seneca needs to run his argument. For what Seneca claims is that, actually, there’s no limit of anger below which we would say one is feeling insufficiently angry. We always think that people are better if they’re less angry. Theophrastus might disagree with this claim, but Seneca backs it up with the claim that it’s unreasonable to be angry at bad people, because they’re simply ignorant, and it’s not their

⁴³ Nicholas Walterstoffs, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*: 156-160 discusses the occurrence of this argument strategy in some detail. He suggests that the claim that better people are less angry ought to be defended via the Stoic commitment to the good life being one of tranquility. I’m uncomfortable with this reading, because it seems that it would be better for the Stoics to defend the claim that the sage doesn’t get angry without appealing to their theory of happiness, to prevent someone arguing against their theory of happiness by claiming that the sage does indeed get angry, and the sage is happy. The more they try to leverage their theory of happiness to steamroll competing accounts of virtue, the weaker their position is.

fault that they're bad.⁴⁴ And he argues that one would have to apply double standards, because everyone has done some bad things. These arguments are not entirely convincing, but they constitute a fair philosophical move.

The strategy at play here is, then, the following:

The less of X one has, the better. Therefore, there is no virtue of 'appropriate X'.

This strategy is aimed at finding fakes, because it involves demolishing an apparent good. It is *prima facie* plausible, but clearly requires some way to establish the antecedent independently from what one thinks of the consequent.

Comparison with a Human's Natural Inclination: this strategy involves comparing a trait with a human being's natural inclination. If the trait is at odds with the human's natural inclination, then we can declare that is not a virtue. In *De Ira*, anger, because it is a desire to hurt people, is compared with what Seneca sees as the natural human inclination to helpfulness and generosity. The mismatch between natural tendencies and anger is perhaps his most central argument that any tendency to feel anger is not a virtue. (*De Ira*, I.5)

Whether or not you buy this argument will depend on what you think about the forces that created human nature. If you think that human nature was the result of an unguided process of natural selection, then you will think that the natural inclinations of a human being are little indication of what is good for a human. If you think that a beneficent divine being

⁴⁴ *De Ira* I.14

guided human beings by instilling particular natural inclinations in people, then you will probably be quite sympathetic to this line of argument. Seneca believed the latter, and so it makes sense for him to include it, perhaps particularly for discussions with other Stoics.

This strategy can be used both to find fakes and to search for goods. It can be used to ensure inclusivity by looking for those traits that do line up with a person's natural inclinations, and to find fakes by looking for those traits that don't. In *De Ira*, Seneca uses it simultaneously for both purposes: to show that a lack of anger is a virtue, and that tetchiness is not one.

The argument strategies we have surveyed so far, then, reflect a strong preference for finding fakes, which is what we would expect given the role for argumentation in Seneca's description of the conceptualisation of virtue, as a way of finding those vices adjacent to and easily confused with virtues.

Section Three: Anger and Living Well

There is one remaining strategy, used extensively in *De Ira*, to which I will devote a good deal of attention. The strategy involves considering the relationship between anger and reason to a good life. Seneca argues that calmness better enables one to lead a good life than anger does.

This could leave the account I'm developing open to the following objection: you claim, the objector says, that Seneca's argumentation about virtue aims to expose vices that are easily mistaken for virtue. The strategies of argumentation he employs are therefore tests that will

reveal that some character trait is not a virtue. The positive conception of virtue is reached through *analogia* on partially good actions and people. But a large portion of the argumentation in *De Ira* suggests a rather different procedure: we start with some notion of a good life, and work out which character traits are best adapted to get us there. These are the virtues. What we find in *De Ira* doesn't reflect the division of labour between *analogia* and philosophical argument you suggested earlier in this chapter. Rather, it suggests an argumentative route to conceptualizing virtue that makes no use of *analogia* at all.

The first thing to be said is that it is not obvious which of two argument schemes Seneca is employing. *Better-suited-to-happiness* is a scheme according to which those character traits which are best suited to leading a happy life are the virtues. This scheme is indeed better adapted to building a ranking of character traits than it is to exposing traits that appear to be virtues, but are in fact vices, and so fits in better with how I described the Peripatetic approach to argumentation. But it may also be that Seneca is employing *incompatibility with happiness*. *Incompatibility with happiness* involves arguing that a character trait makes certain actions that are sometimes essential to a good life impossible, and so it is not a virtue. If Seneca is employing *incompatibility with happiness*, then the appearance of a comparison arises for the following reason: first, he defends calmness against a charge of *incompatibility with happiness*, and, second, he applies the same scheme to a tendency to get angry.

The second thing to be said is that, whichever of the two strategies it is, Seneca only employs it in response to Peripatetic arguments against calmness. This means that the scheme, although prevalent in *De Ira*, need not fit neatly into Seneca's approach to investigating virtue. It would be enough that Seneca thought that this particular application of the scheme

offered a challenge to his claim that a complete lack of anger was a virtue. In this case, if the scheme in question was *better-suited-to-happiness*, it would have a distinctly Senecan flavor. We could capture that scheme as follows: if you can show, about trait X, that there is trait Y, which cannot be held alongside trait X, and which better enables one to live a good life, then trait X is not a virtue. This scheme would fit in well to an overall strategy of identifying imposter virtues. In any case, the fact that he uses of the argument scheme are in responding to objections indicates that the argument scheme is marginal for Seneca's approach.

Let us turn to the applications of the scheme in *De Ira*. First, Seneca argues not only that the virtuous person has no need of anger, but that anger makes the virtuous person less effective at achieving her goals. He considers possible uses for anger: warfare, correction, and revenge. In each of these cases, he argues that it is better to follow reason than anger.

In the case of correction, Seneca argues that penalties should not be vindictive. When someone has gone astray, Seneca thought that it was sometimes necessary to imprison them, beat them, or even to kill them. But he thought that this should be done with a view to *correcting them*, and ultimately helping them. For this reason, he argued that it is best to use the lightest touch possible when administering corrections. Reason is capable of calculating the lightest touch and applying it gently, whereas anger will rush in with much heavier and more vindictive measures. For this reason, the goals of correction – namely, to put someone back on track with as little discomfort to them as possible – are better achieved by reason than by anger.

In the case of warfare, Seneca denies the Aristotelian position that ‘nobody can fight without anger’, and argues that it is not possible for anger to be put into service of reason.⁴⁵ He claims that it simply isn’t anger if it obeys reason. He argues that if reason is in a position where it needs to draw on an emotion to do what it wants to do, then it is not superior and in command of the emotions, but its equal. And he argues, through the use of examples, that angry people do not fight as well as calm people.

In the case of revenge and protection of friends, Seneca argues again that anger simply doesn’t help one to achieve it. The reason Seneca gives is that anger is impatient, and often tries to rush the process of getting revenge in such a way as to ruin its chances of revenge. A person going about getting revenge through reason can take her time, and develop a slow and purposeful plan. And so if you want to get revenge, you’re better off doing so without anger.

The language Seneca uses here is of ‘reason’ (*ratio*) vs ‘anger’, which is a contrast that a Peripatetic would almost certainly have rejected. Feeling anger is compatible, for the Peripatetic, with living reasonably. According to Seneca, however, although anger is only possible in rational animals, when it arises, reason is temporarily suspended, which is what allows him to make the contrast. Seneca’s language obscures what’s really at stake here.

Seneca’s definition of anger is:

Anger is a desire to avenge an injury or, as Posidonius says, a desire to punish a person by who you judge yourself to have been harmed unjustly.

⁴⁵ Seneca quotes from Aristotle directly at *De Ira* I.9.

Some people define it as follows: anger is an incitement of the soul to harm someone who either harmed or wanted to harm.⁴⁶

The common idea in all three definitions is that anger is a desire of some kind to harm another person.⁴⁷ It either involves the notion of vengeance explicitly, or involves a judgment that one has been harmed unjustly, and for this reason cannot be experienced by animals. Seneca contrasts this with Aristotle's definition, which he says is only a little different from his: anger, on this definition, is a desire to repay suffering, which doesn't contain any sophisticated judgments, and so can be experienced by animals.⁴⁸ Aristotle thought that holding such a desire was perfectly compatible with being in possession of one's reason, while Seneca did not. To make the contrast between being angry and being reasonable is therefore one that misleadingly characterizes their positions.

A clearer way to characterize the difference is between sometimes desiring to harm others, and never desiring to harm others. The claim that anger is sometimes necessary to live well is the claim that sometimes, we must act out of a desire to harm others (at least, those who have harmed us); Seneca's denial of the claim is that we ought never to experience such desires (at

⁴⁶ This definition is missing from the manuscripts of *De Ira*, but is cited in Lactantius *De Ira Dei* 17.13. Because Lactantius' quote extends to Seneca's statement of Aristotle's definition, we can safely assume that the text comes immediately before, that is, between *De Ira* III.2 and III.3. *Ira est cupiditas ulciscendae iniuriae aut, ut ait Posidonius, cupiditas puniendi eius a quo te inique putes laesum. Quidam ita finierunt: ira est incitatio animi ad nocendum ei qui aut nocuit aut nocere uoluit.*

⁴⁷ This point is importantly missed by, for example, Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*: 415-417. For Seneca's treatment of anger, such issues as whether an injustice is important, or whether one can treat it as serious when a family member is harmed, are not important: the core issue is whether one ought sometimes have a desire to harm someone else (as opposed to preferring not to harm them but seeing it as necessary for some reason).

⁴⁸ This definition varies from the one Aristotle gives in the *Rhetoric*, which is extremely close to Seneca's and Posidonius' in that it involves the notion of revenge, as well as the idea that the slight was not deserved. (*Rh* 1378a30-1)

least, not to those who have harmed us). When Seneca talks about correction, as I mentioned, he stresses that penalties should come from a desire to help the person being punished. And when he talks about revenge and protection, the motivation in question must not be a desire simply to harm the other person, but rather, for example, a desire to honour one's friend, or to protect them. Mimicking anger involves *pretending* to desire to harm someone, while actually having no such desire, and at most seeing the necessity of harming them as a pity.

These arguments, then, trade not on conceptual claims, but empirical psychological ones, about what the best way of getting things done is. If desiring to harm people who have wronged or harmed us does turn out to make people better fighters, act with more justice, and be more effective at offering correction, then Seneca's argument fails. And while Seneca makes some empirical observations, arguing from example, his arguments don't add up to anything like the sort of case we would need to establish that anger interfered in a negative way with decision making. Although we might concede that this sort of armchair speculation was the best Seneca had available to him, we might well worry about the continued relevance of the argument.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ At *De Ira* I.9, Seneca responds to Aristotle's suggestion that anger must serve as a foot-soldier by saying that anything that can serve as a foot-soldier simply isn't anger, and must be called by another name. I take this claim also to be empirical, rather than conceptual: the claim is that if you think you have some desire to harm another person, accompanied by the judgment that the person has harmed you unjustly, but you find that it obeys reason, you're mistaken. Either you lack the judgment, or the desire has some other object. For example, you might think you want to harm the enemy soldiers because they committed an injustice against you, but what you actually desire is the restoration of honour to your nation, and you desire to harm the soldiers merely as a means to this end. Seneca's claim is one about what it's like to just want to hurt another person. The reason I want to take it this way is that this allows Seneca consistency both with his own definition, and with popular definitions of anger, and it maintains the relevance of *De Ira* as a treatise. If he is really updating his definition here, then this renders the whole of *De Ira* without interest, since *De Ira* becomes an argument for a conclusion that I think few people would disagree with, namely, that virtuous people do not feel completely and wildly uncontrolled anger. The philosophical sharpness that Seneca reflects throughout the rest of his corpus should give us very strong hesitation in attributing to him such a basic error. But on top of this argument there's a very strong textual reason to take Seneca as staying with his initial definition, which is that the text continues in the following way: "Thus it will either

Nevertheless, in the dialectical context these arguments occur, the armchair speculation is perhaps helpful. Seneca is attempting to respond to criticisms that may appear, on the surface of it, to depend on claims about human psychology that are *obviously true*. Offering an alternative account which is roughly as plausible as the default account would bring the situation to a draw on these arguments: we would have to try to resolve the question as best we could without the psychological assumptions about what angry people were and were not capable of doing. So long as Seneca is only using these arguments to respond to an argument that calmness is not a virtue, the armchair speculation is not a large problem, and the argument retains its relevance.

Which strategy is at play in these arguments? Seneca's opponents claim, not only that anger is useful in battle against enemies, but that it is *necessary*. (*De Ira* I.8, 10) The thought of necessity is implicit in the question "what then? Is punishment not sometimes necessary?" (*De Ira* I.6) The question makes the most sense on the assumption that you need to be angry to punish somebody, not merely that it helps make the punishment more effective. And obviously, if anger is the appropriate response to the murder of one's father, then the claim is that without anger, one will simply not be able to have this response. This suggests that the strategy is not that of claiming that an angry person lives better than one who lives a mild

not be anger or useless. For if someone who exacts punishment not for the sake of punishment itself, but since it is necessary, he does not count as angry." (ita aut ira non est aut inutilis est. Nam si quis poenam exigit non ipsius poenae avidus sed quia oportet, non est adnumerandus iratis.) Anger was defined as a desire for revenge : the desire for revenge is not there in the person who punishes someone because it is necessary, rather the desire is, perhaps, to carry out his duty, or to help the other person – that's why it's not anger.

life, but rather, that of claiming that someone who never feels angry cannot live a fully good life, that is, that the strategy is *incompatibility with happiness*.

Seneca's responses, however, go beyond merely showing that anger is not necessary. Seneca argues that a calm person carries out the actions in question better. For example, he attributes the lack of military success of the Teutons to their anger. (*De Ira I.11*) And he argues, not that someone who is angry *cannot* take revenge, but just that they do so less efficiently than a person who is not. (*De Ira I.12*) It is, of course, a good way to show that something is not necessary, to show that it is a hindrance. But Seneca's concern to show not only that anger is unnecessary, but also that it does not help, might reflect that what is really going on here is an attempt to show which is more useful for living a good life, that is, it suggests that the scheme in question is *better-suited-to-happiness*.

It is significant, I think, that Seneca chooses to introduce the discussions in which these arguments occur often by questions, (*De Ira I.6, 12*) and at other times by claims made by people he disagrees with. (*De Ira I.9.2, 11, 13.3, 14*) For this indicates that in these sections, Seneca is discussing not his own arguments, but responding to objections to his view. He has put forwards the claim that a good person never gets angry, that any degree of irascibility is a vice. Seneca now takes up the position of dialectical answerer, considering attempts that might be made at refuting his position, and outlines how they are to be met. Seneca's response to the argument indicates that he thinks that, in this case, the argument presents an important enough challenge to need a response, but it doesn't show that he would employ the argument scheme of his own initiative, or think it generally a good way to argue.

If this is right, then we can explain why Seneca thinks this particular case of *better-suited-to-happiness* is problematic by seeing how its use can be turned into another scheme: a trait X is not a virtue, if there is a trait Y, incompatible with X, which is more helpful than X for living a good life. While Seneca might have reasons for avoiding the scheme himself, such as the difficulty of showing what is more helpful for living a good life than what, the scheme is one well calibrated for discovering fakes. In this case, the concern that Seneca would be responding to would be that he had misidentified which of the character traits in question was a fake: namely, having no temper at all. The burden on Seneca is, if not to demonstrate beyond all doubt that having no temper at all is in fact more helpful than having a very slight one, at least to take away the plausibility from the idea that getting angry sometimes is clearly more helpful than never getting angry.

The discussion of the role of anger in the good life, then, is not something that speaks strongly against reading the argumentation in *De Ira* against the background of *EM 120*. Either, the argumentation is employing *incompatibility with happiness*, in which case the arguments are well-suited to the task of exposing those vices that Seneca thought were adjacent to virtues. If this is the case, then it will be important for Seneca to show that his opponents cannot employ the argument scheme to show that a completely mild temper is not a virtue. But even if the argumentation is indeed employing *better-suited-to-happiness*, Seneca is entertaining the argument because his opponents used it, and in this particular case, the argument seems to do more than simply establish a ranking: because having enough of a temper to get angry sometimes and having no temper at all are incompatible traits, this particular application threatens to expose a complete lack of temper as a fake. Seneca must show he can respond to this. But none of this suggests that *De Ira* in fact employs a

procedure according to which Seneca considers which is better adapted for living a good life: no temper at all, or a fairly restrained temper. Indeed, whichever way you take these arguments, they seem to contribute well to the task I identified through my reading of *EM* 120.

Section Four: Conclusion of Chapter

Seneca's understanding of the purposes of argument in the investigation into the good is that philosophical argument has a minor but important role to play. Because, according to Seneca, people have the capacity to recognise partially good actions and people, and to extrapolate from them, via *analogia*, to an accurate conception of a perfectly good person, he thinks that the right conception of virtue is formed by extrapolation from experience. Nevertheless, experience is potentially treacherous: in particular, some things that appear to us to be virtues are actually vices. We have to pay particular attention to them, to avoid extrapolating from the wrong points in forming our conception of the fully virtuous person. Thus philosophical argument works alongside other epistemic capabilities by finding fakes.

As elsewhere for Seneca, philosophical argument here plays the role of finding fakes. For this reason, the argument schemes that Seneca employs are tests of authenticity. They are to be applied to character traits that appear to be virtues, and they will indicate the ones that are not really virtues. This means that the standard of acceptability, for Seneca, of an argument scheme in the study of virtue is whether it is good for detecting vices in the guise of virtues. There is no point, for him, to include schemes that would reveal something to be a virtue,

when it is not obviously so, for he believes that we will gain an accurate positive conception of virtue through extrapolation. To approach Seneca's arguments about virtue with any other standard in mind is to misunderstand Seneca's philosophical practice.

Section Five: Authenticity Tests vs Ranking and Searching

To recap: my main claim is that, while it is true that ancient philosophers agreed in giving pride of place to investigation into what is and isn't good, they differed from each other substantially in the role that philosophical argument ought to play in helping us in this investigation. And this leads to different standards being applied to determine whether an argument scheme was acceptable for use in investigating the good.

We are now in a position to see that this much at least holds true when we compare Aristotle with Seneca. For Aristotle, the chief goal is finding the highest good, and the strategy he applies is what I called search and rank: Aristotle was much more willing to accept argument schemes that gave reasons for thinking that something was good, than those that did not. This is because he thought only the position of the highest good had practical importance: so long as we think we are unlikely to make the mistake of ranking a merely apparent good as the highest good, then there's no harm in accepting some things that aren't really good. The challenge was developing a robust battery of tests that would facilitate the identification of the highest good, and we see that Aristotle's primary interest lies in schemes that constitute such tests.

In Seneca, we find a rather different focus. Seneca thought that, once we accepted that something was good, we would value it, and spend some time pursuing it, at the cost of time and energy pursuing other things, and possibly to the integrity of one's life. He saw these as severe costs. Furthermore, he thought that we had an ability to recognise virtue, but that this ability tended to lead us to value too many traits: not just real virtues, but the vices that lie right next to virtues. The role of philosophical argument is therefore to expose things that appear to be good, but that are not really. Seneca's argumentation, if it goes wrong, will go wrong by declaring things not good, which actually are; Aristotle's has the opposite bias.

For the goals of ranking goods and searching for hidden goods, the arguments we find in Seneca are of little use. Equally, if we accept Seneca's concerns about the importance of falsely believing that something is good, when it is not, and of the difficulty of false virtues, then Aristotle's style of argumentation will seem unacceptable to us.

In understanding the divergence in opinion between Aristotle and Seneca about the goodness of things, it's important to understand the divergence in the conception of the problem. This divergence of opinion set the standards by which arguments would be seen as adequate or not. And in each case, the conception of the problem seems largely to have been assumed, rather than arrived at by argument and reflection. Note, again, that what is assumed is considerably less than will be argued for: Seneca does not start out by assuming that virtue is the only good, but rather that it is particularly important to be wary of merely apparent goods; Aristotle does not start out by assuming that the highest good is contemplation, but that it is particularly important to identify the highest good. Nevertheless, these assumptions are significant enough that it is not possible to explain the divergence of opinion between these

two thinkers simply as the result of two people reasoning about the same problem and coming to different conclusions. Nevertheless, this shouldn't lead us to underrate the importance of reason to both of them in forming their conclusions about what was and wasn't good; starting from their different answers to the central question, each tried in an intellectually rigorous and honest way to put reason to the task they set out for it.

~Epicurus~

Observing Desire and Fear

For Plato, Seneca and Aristotle the study of what is good and what is not was primarily a study of the things out there in the world. To find out whether pleasure is good, for example, we must consider what kind of thing pleasure is. The results of this study will tell us about our desire for pleasure: roughly, if pleasure is good, then so is our desire for it; if pleasure is not good, then neither is our desire for it.

My aim in the next two chapters is to show that, for Epicurus, the focus is on our desires first and foremost. The study of the good is not a study of things out there in the world, but of our desires and fears. The question of what things are to be desired is to be answered by seeing under what circumstances we desire certain things, and what effect these desires have on our satisfaction. This leads to a strikingly idiosyncratic approach to argumentation about the goodness of things, an approach which commentators since Cicero have far too readily assimilated the approach of their adversaries.

How are desires to be evaluated, if not by seeing whether their objects are good? Epicurus' alternative is somewhat surprising: it involves inspecting how the desire was acquired, and the impact the desire has on those who possess it. In the first chapter, I will argue that Epicurus' cradle argument forms part of a comparison between two kinds of desires. The first kind are desires that we can avoid developing, and that lead to dissatisfaction, such as the desires that develop in romantic love. The second kind of desires are ones that we cannot avoid developing, such as sexual desires and the desire of pleasure, and these do not lead to dissatisfaction. There is a conflict between these desires, in that the first class prevent us from fulfilling the desires in the second. And, we develop the desires in the second class earlier than the desires in the first class. Given these observations, we have good reason to avoid developing the desires in the first class: from the point of view of the desires we had when we put ourselves into situations in which they developed, it was a mistake to develop them in the first place. The question of whether we would be better off without the desires in the second class doesn't even come up, since that is not a possibility for us.

In the first chapter on the Epicureans, I argue that Epicurus' cradle argument fits into this overall procedure, by providing one step of the argument: showing that we could not have avoided developing the desire for pleasure, and so the question of whether we should have avoided developing it doesn't really arise. This is a new reading of the argument, which opposes the dominant reading, according to which Epicurus' claim is that we can *sense* the goodness of pleasure. Although Cicero attributes this claim to Epicurus, I argue this attribution is likely to be incorrect.

The second way we can evaluate a desire or fear directly, rather than its object, is by seeing the effect of understanding on the drive in question. If understanding the object better systematically leads people to stop desiring or fearing it, then we can conclude that the desire or fear is faulty.

In the second chapter, I argue that this is the procedure that Epicurus uses in arguing against the claim that death should be feared. To establish this conclusion, I will show that when Epicurus says “death is nothing to us”, he is most likely simply claiming that death has no relation to us, rather than that death is not bad for us; in other words, rather than being a statement of value, it’s a statement of the metaphysical status of death. The fear of death is cured by the repeated study of the Epicurean science of death, combined with arguments that help push us to eliminate stubborn and persistent tendencies to think of ourselves as continuing to exist beyond death. Epicurus never shows directly that death is not bad; it is enough to show that the fear of death abates when we understand death properly, to show that it is not something to be feared. This, I will argue, is exactly the procedure that Lucretius outlines in the opening lines of *DRN III*.

The focus on the status of our desires and fears, rather than the objects of the world, is clear in my discussions in both chapters. In the first chapter, it is not any particular feature of pleasure that makes it good, or pain that makes it bad, but simply that our desire for it is both unavoidable and easy to satisfy. What makes romantic partners undesirable is that the desire for them conflicts with earlier, unchangeable desires that we have, and that the desire for romantic partners possible to avoid. In the second chapter, we see that, although a wise person understands death well, they do not draw the conclusion that death is not bad from any

feature of death. Rather, they simply find that once they had understood and fully internalised the fact that their soul perished with their body, they found they no longer feared death.

It is difficult to say what prompts the Epicureans to take this focus, which is very different from Seneca's or Aristotle's. I would like to make a tentative suggestion. This method of considering desires fits well within an epistemological framework where sense perception comes very close to exhausting what we can know. Epicurean ethics, read this way, is grounded in observations about what people want, what they fear, and under what conditions they want and fear these things.¹

The suggestion is tentative, because the role of sense perception in Epicurean ethics is complicated, by the possibility of mental perception, by the claim that we can know that there are gods because everybody believes that there are some, and by the problem of what is meant by a *preconception*. Nevertheless, the Epicureans, and their opponents, repeatedly emphasise their desire to stay very close to what can be observed by the senses, and, if I am right about how they argue in ethics, their focus on the desires and fears people actually have enables them to argue for a conception of the good life while staying very close indeed to sense perception.

¹ I discuss these epistemological issues in the next chapter

~Epicurus~

Part One: Observing Desires in the Cradle

“Every infant, from the moment it is born,” notes Epicurus, stating the premise of his famous cradle argument, “pursues pleasure and avoids pain. Thus, pleasure is good, and pain is bad.”

Stated like this, Epicurus’ cradle argument sounds like an attempt to ground moral theory on simple observations about who desires what, and under what conditions.¹ This matches well with the idea, which I will be arguing for in this chapter and the next, that the Epicureans were trying to base their moral theory on observation. The problem is, it doesn’t seem like a

¹ In this way, it could be understood as an attempt to provide justification for a moral theory from within the framework of a broadly empiricist epistemology. For some who have given up on its solution, see, e.g. JL Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*; AJ Ayer, *Language Truth and Logic*. Of course, not everyone is so pessimistic. See, e.g, R Boyd, “How to be a Moral Realist”.

very successful attempt.² Why should we, after all, place special weight to desires we had in the cradle?

According to the standard solution to this problem, which I will call the Tulli-Brunschwig solution, the appearance of this argument is deceptive: the observation itself is supposed to help us recognise the application of a standard of truth, that is, the feelings of pleasure and pain.³ According to this solution, the feelings of pleasure and pain were, for Epicurus, just ways of sensing goodness and badness; the fact that infants judge goodness and badness on the basis of these sensations shows us that we are not deceived in thinking of them as such. If this solution is right, then the methodology of Epicurean ethics is not observation as we would understand it, but rather an appeal to an ability to detect goodness and badness.

² This is without even taking into account the issue that the pleasures in the cradle seem to be what Epicurus would call *kinetic* pleasures, whereas his view is that the good consists in *katastematic* pleasure. Philip Mitsis' *Epicurus' Ethical Theory: The Pleasures of Invulnerability*, quite possibly has the right response to this objection. Mitsis denies that Epicurus is distinguishing between two different kinds of pleasure, but rather two different sources of pleasure. Epicurus, according to Mitsis, thought that the state of freedom of pain was in fact an enormous source of pleasure. This is an empirical claim, but a very difficult one to test, because Epicurus thought that people were suffering from the fear of death, perhaps without even realising that this was why they were unhappy. While this is empirically reckless, it is also true that our ability to find ways to live well is limited by the state of the science of psychology, and that we do what we can with our guesses about what people are like and what they will find satisfying. If Epicurus had waited for the perfection of the science of psychology, he would not have developed his moral theory, and philosophy would be much poorer for that. For another good possible reply, see Sedley, "The Inferential Foundations of Epicurean Ethics": 313-34

³ In the excellent J Brunschwig, "The Cradle Argument in Epicureanism and Stoicism". Although I ultimately disagree with Brunschwig's reading of the cradle argument, his article deserves the status it has as a classic. Sedley, in his "The Inferential Foundations of Epicurean Ethics", offers what he sees as an alternative reading of the cradle argument. Sedley claims that Brunschwig sees the intuitions of adult human as the evidence that pleasure is the good, and that the judgement of children and animals only gives us confidence that this intuition is correct. This reading of Brunschwig is incorrect, since what is important for Brunschwig is, as for Sedley, the universality of the judgement that pleasure is good: the alternative reading that Sedley offers is so close to Brunschwig's actual position that I won't deal with it separately here.

I will argue in this chapter against the Tulli-Brunschwig solution, suggesting instead that the best way to understand Epicurus' cradle argument is as part of a case that pleasure is the good which consists in comparing various desires we have on the basis of observations about what happens if we obtain the objects of the desires, and if we do not obtain the objects. In considering the case in which we do not obtain the objects of our desires, it is very important for Epicurus whether we can free ourselves of the desire in some other way, either by avoiding situations that would lead the desire to form in the first place, or by improving our understanding of the desire's objects. Epicurus argues that, in the case of many desires, so long as we are free of the desire, it will make no difference to us whether we obtain the object. The cradle argument is important, because it is part of the case that, for pleasure and freedom from pain, there is no state in which we are free from desire.

In my case against the Tulli-Brunschwig solution, I will show that the evidence for it is far from overwhelming. It is supported by only one of the three later statements of the cradle argument.⁴ Furthermore, if the other statements are closer to Epicurus' own words, then they would leave the problem with which we started: the argument, stated on its own, seems bad. It would make sense for later, sympathetic interpreters to try to find some doctrine of Epicurus' that would fill the gap. And the evidence we have makes it seem likely that this is what happened, because we find in Cicero's statement of the cradle argument something similar to a doctrine of Epicurus' reported elsewhere in the extant evidence, but made into a bolder claim than it seems to be there: this is exactly what we might expect if the doctrine had been supplied by a later interpreter trying to make sense of a perplexing argument.

⁴ It is supported by the one found in *De Fin. I.30*. No support for it is to be found in the statements in *DL X.137* and *M XI.96*.

In the first section of the chapter, I outline an interpretative dilemma offered by the conflict in the evidence: do we take Cicero's statement of the cradle argument to be closer to Epicurus' words than the other reports, or vice versa? In the second section I show that the doctrines about pleasure and pain's epistemic status in Cicero's statement of the cradle argument involve rather bolder claims than appear in Epicurus' statement of these doctrines elsewhere, suggesting that these were used by a later interpreter to try to make sense of the argument. In the third section, I outline an alternative reading of the cradle argument, in which it functions within a common Epicurean strategy for evaluating desires.

Section One: The Tulli-Brunschwig Solution

The Tulli-Brunschwig solution finds its support in Cicero's statement of the cradle argument in *De Fin.* But it is unsupported by other extant reports in *DL* and *M XI*. This will offer us a dilemma: which reports are closer to Epicurus' own words? Are the reports in *DL* and *M XI* truncated, missing an essential premise? Or was Epicurus' statement of his argument sufficiently terse to lead later interpreters, most likely later Epicureans, to try to sniff out a suppressed premise from among his other doctrines?

We find support for the Tulli-Brunschwig solution in Torquatus' statement of the cradle argument in the *De Fin.* Here is his statement in full:

Epicurus placed this in pleasure, which he wants to be the greatest good, and pain the greatest evil, and he undertook to teach it in the following way:

[1] Every animal, as soon as it is born, seeks pleasure and rejoices in it as the highest good, and hates pain as the highest evil, and, as much as possible, pushes it away. And it does this before it has been corrupted, with nature judging without corruption and intactly.

[2] And thus he denied that either a ground or a discussion was necessary about the matter of whether pleasure was to be pursued, and pain to be fled: he judged that these are sensed, as that fire is hot, snow is white, honey sweet, matters about which there is no need for delicate argumentation to confirm, but rather in which a reminder is sufficient.

[3] For there is a difference between a) an argument and a conclusion of reason and b) a moderate turning of attention and reminder: the former indeed make apparent things hidden and, if you will, *concealed*, the latter point out manifest and plain things.

[4] Since nothing is left when senses are taken away from a person, it is necessary that what is in accordance with nature or against it be judged by nature herself. And what thing would she understand or judge, [to be the standard] according to which she should seek or flee something, beside pleasure and pain?⁵ (*De Fin*, I.30)

⁵ Omne animal, simul atque natum sit, voluptatem appetere eaque gaudere ut summo bono, dolorem aspernari ut summum malum et, quantum possit, a se repellere, idque facere nondum depravatum ipsa

Brunschwig's statement of the Tulli-Brunschwig solution rests on his interpretation of this passage.⁶ The key elements of Brunschwig's reading are that the conclusion of the argument is that one does not need to argue that pleasure is the highest good, or that pain is the worst evil, and that pleasure and pain operate as criteria of goodness and badness. As evidence, Brunschwig reasonably enough cites [2]: the cradle argument is only meant to be a reminder and a pointing out of what is obvious. And this works, because we feel the goodness of pleasure and the evil of pain in much the same way as we feel the whiteness of snow or the heat of fire. But if pleasure and pain are criteria of goodness and badness, Brunschwig worries, the cradle argument would be otiose: surely adults would be able to simply use the perception directly? Here Brunschwig points out Cicero's stress on the pure and uncorrupt judgement of infants in [1], and argues that the social conditioning of adults makes their grip on the data of the moral sense shaky. Can they successfully work out which beliefs are grounded from their moral sense and which come from aspects of their upbringing? They can quite reasonably doubt their ability to correctly make such a differentiation, and this is where the cradle argument comes in. It guarantees, in Brunschwig's words, that there is in "the allure of pleasure, as felt by the adult, a legitimate application of the emotive criterion."⁷

natura incorrupte atque integre iudicante. itaque negat opus esse ratione neque disputatione, quam ob rem voluptas expetenda, fugiendus dolor sit. sentiri haec putat, ut calere ignem, nivem esse albam, dulce mel, quorum nihil oportere exquisitis rationibus confirmare, tantum satis esse admonere. interesse enim inter argumentum conclusionemque rationis et inter mediocre animadversionem atque admonitionem. altera occulta quaedam et quasi involuta aperiri, altera prompta et aperta iudicari. etenim quoniam detractis de homine sensibus reliqui nihil est, necesse est, quid aut ad naturam aut contra sit, a natura ipsa iudicari. ea quid percipit aut quid iudicat, quo aut petat aut fugiat aliquid, praeter voluptatem et dolorem?

⁶ This interpretation is found in his "The Cradle Argument": 116–122

⁷ "The Cradle Argument": 122. I will handle Brunschwig's designation of the moral sense as the 'emotive criterion' in the next section, where it belongs.

I find Brunschwig's reading of Cicero's argument to be compelling, and do not wish to dispute that it is the correct way to read Cicero. Cicero's statement of the cradle argument is not, however, the only surviving statement, and it's important that it is the only one in which the claim that there's something like perception of goodness and badness occurs. Diogenes Laertius states the cradle argument as follows:

He used as a proof that pleasure is the end that the animal is at once born and is satisfied by it, and that it dislikes pain, naturally and independent of reason. Thus we flee suffering through our own feelings [*autopathōs*].⁸ (DL X.137 = Us. 66)

In Diogenes' account we find again the emphasis on the independence of the infant's pursuit of pleasure and pain. But we find in his statement of the argument no solution to the problem of why we should think that the infants' preferences are reliable indicators of what's good and what's bad. Brunschwig reads "through our own feelings" [*autopathōs*] as being a residue of the doctrine of the moral sense, because he locates the moral sense in the sensations of pleasure and pain, the *pathē*.⁹ But this is hardly decisive: the force of emphasising that we flee suffering *autopathōs* could just as well be a renewed emphasis on the independence of our feelings from our cultural upbringing, as it could be an appeal to the feelings' status as the criterion of goodness and badness. From Diogenes Laertius' text alone, it would be reckless to attribute some kind of moral sense doctrine to Epicurus.

⁸ ἀποδείξει δὲ χρήται τοῦ τέλους εἶναι τὴν ἡδονὴν τῷ τὰ ζῶα ἅμα τῷ γεννηθῆναι τῇ μὲν εὐαρεστεῖσθαι, τῷ δὲ πόνῳ προσκρούειν φυσικῶς καὶ χωρὶς λόγου. αὐτοπαθῶς οὖν φεύγομεν τὴν ἀλγηδόνα·

⁹ "The Cradle Argument": 124–125

The same lack is apparent in Sextus Empiricus' statement of the cradle argument. Sextus doesn't attribute the cradle argument to Epicurus himself, but to some Epicureans. Nonetheless, the absence of the moral sense doctrine is important. His statement of the argument is as follows:

But some members of the Epicurean school tend to say about this sort of problem, that the animal flees suffering naturally and without being taught, and pursues pleasure. And when it is born and not yet enslaved by opinions, as soon as it was struck by the unaccustomed cold of the air it cried out and wailed. And if it naturally seeks pleasure, and avoids pain, then pain is something for it to flee by nature, and pleasure something for it to choose.¹⁰

(M XI.96)

Here, Sextus provides the bridge between the infants' behaviour on the one hand, and the goodness of pleasure and pain on the other, through the bald statement of a conditional: if it is pursued naturally, then it is by nature to be pursued. The emphasis is present, again, on a lack of cultural influence – nature is contrasted with teaching, and with being enslaved by opinions. Brunschwig sees in this conditional an illegitimate inference from an is to an ought. This goes too far, but the statements in both Diogenes Laertius and in Sextus leave open the important question: what gives the infants' preference their authority? This question is answered in Cicero.

¹⁰ Ἄλλ' εἰώθασι τινες τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς Ἐπικούρου αἰρέσεως πρὸς τὰς τοιαύτας ἀπορίας ὑπαντῶντες λέγειν, ὅτι φυσικῶς καὶ ἀδιδάκτως τὸ ζῶον φεύγει μὲν τὴν ἀλγηδόνα, διώκει δὲ τὴν ἡδονήν· γεννηθὲν γοῦν καὶ μηδέπω τοῖς κατὰ δόξαν δουλεῦον ἅμα τῷ ῥαπισθῆναι ἀσυνήθει ἀέρος ψύξει ἐκλαυσέ τε καὶ ἐκώκυσεν. εἰ δὲ φυσικῶς ὁρμᾷ μὲν πρὸς ἡδονήν, ἐκκλίνει δὲ τὸν πόνον, φύσει φευκτόν τί ἐστὶν αὐτῷ ὁ πόνος καὶ αἰρετόν ἢ ἡδονή.

What explains the difference between the accounts? There are two distinct possibilities. On the first possibility, Cicero had access to a statement of the cradle argument by Epicurus that was considerably more complete than that in Sextus or in Diogenes Laertius. If this is right, then the elements of Cicero's statement of the cradle argument that go beyond those present in the other statements could still be reasonably faithful records of Epicurus' thought. It's important to make the observation that this scenario is possible even if Sextus and Diogenes were reading the same Epicurean work as Cicero. From the style of their writing, Sextus and Diogenes both seem to prefer far briefer statements of arguments, in comparison to Cicero's sprawls. In the interests of brevity, they may have abridged and simplified Epicurus' position, and Cicero's record could even be the most faithful. If this possibility is correct, then the Tulli-Brunschwig solution is most likely the right solution to our problem.

There is, however, another possibility. This is that the statements in *MXI* and *DL* are in fact complete and accurate records of the cradle argument as stated by Epicurus. Later interpreters, including perhaps some of Cicero's Epicurean sources, or perhaps even Cicero himself, were puzzled by the argument, and reasoned that there must be an unstated assumption. Following good interpretative practice, they sought out some doctrine of Epicurus' that could fill the gap. They correctly noted that Epicurus lists the passions of pleasure and pain as sources of knowledge, right alongside sense perception, and that he says they are the standard by which choice and avoidance is to be determined. This doctrine seemed to them to fill the gap, and they argued that this was what Epicurus must have had in mind, with a view to understanding his line of reasoning.

A consideration that might lend weight to the first account is that Cicero not only reports Epicurus' version of the cradle argument, but also a debate about the cradle argument among Epicureans, mentioning a group of Epicureans who argued that perception was not sufficient to determine the goodness and badness of pleasure and pain; a second group, of which Torquatus was one, saw it as necessary to engage arguments that pleasure and pain were not good. But, as we will see, these Epicureans may just as well have been discussing the best way to interpret Epicurus' argument, if, as on the second hypothesis, later interpreters saw a need to plug the gap by providing Epicurean doctrines. Here is the relevant text:

There are however some among us, who wish to teach more subtly and deny that it is enough to judge with the sense what is good or what is bad, but indeed that it can be understood with the rational soul as well that pleasure itself is to be sought for itself, and pain itself to be fled for itself. Thus they say that this notion as it were 'naturally', or implanted in our soul, so that we perceive that the one is to be sought, the other to be avoided.

Since very many things have been said by many philosophers about why pleasure is not to be counted among the goods, nor pain among the bads, others, with whom I agree, judge that it is not appropriate for us to put too much faith in our case, but that it is necessary to argue and accurately make things clear, and to judge with searching reasonings the debate about pleasure and pain.¹¹ (*De Fin. I.30*)

¹¹ Sunt autem quidam e nostris, qui haec subtilius velint tradere et negent satis esse, quid bonum sit aut quid malum, sensu iudicari, sed animo etiam ac ratione intellegi posse et voluptatem ipsam per se esse expetendam et dolorem ipsum per se esse fugiendum. itaque aiunt hanc quasi naturalem atque insitam in animis nostris inesse notionem, ut alterum esse appetendum, alterum aspernandum

We find two suggestions here which Cicero has Torquatus present as suggestions by later Epicureans for either supplementing or altering the cradle argument. The first suggestion is that, instead of relying on the premise that the goodness of pleasure is sensed as the sweetness of honey, the cradle argument needs the additional, or alternative, proposition that there is an innate notion of the goodness of pleasure and the badness of pain in us. Most likely, this proposition would have served as a sub-conclusion, making the cradle argument parallel Epicurus' argument for the existence of gods: because everyone everywhere believes in gods, we must have a naturally implanted idea of them, and so they must exist. Similarly for pleasure, since everyone, from birth, sees it as desirable, we must have an implanted notion of its desirability.

While it is possible that these Epicureans were arguing against the explicit statements of Epicurus, their position makes very good sense if we assume that Epicurus' statement of the cradle argument was as terse in the reports in *DL* and *M XI*. For in this case, these Epicureans would be asking not how to *correct* Epicurus, but how best to *understand* him. Because they thought it didn't make sense for the goodness of pleasure to be sensed, they looked for some parallel in Epicurus' thought, and happened upon a similarity of structure with the argument for the existence of gods. In this case, they would be correcting not Epicurus, but later interpreters of Epicurus within their school, which would be a considerably lesser impertinence. Their reconstruction of the cradle argument seems rather plausible to me, and

sentiamus. Alii autem, quibus ego assentior, cum a philosophis compluribus permulta dicantur, cur nec voluptas in bonis sit numeranda nec in malis dolor, non existimant oportere nimium nos causas confidere, sed et argumentandum et accurate disserendum et rationibus conquisitis de voluptate et dolore disputandum putant.

indeed more plausible to than the Tulli-Brunschwig reconstruction, but I think there were closer parallels, as we will see later, and these parallels help us see why the cradle argument is so tersely stated.

The second position has nothing to do with how we should construe the cradle argument, but rather to do with whether Epicureans should bother to respond to arguments purporting to show that pleasure is not a good, and pain is not a bad. It would make sense to find disagreement about this among Epicureans regardless of what their case was, so long as they put forward some kind of positive case. The question here is simply one of methodology: whether one needs to consider opposing views or not, and doesn't limit our reconstruction of Epicurus' case.

We have, then, two options to decide between. According to the first, Cicero's report in *De Fin.* accurately captures Epicurus' words, and the reports in *DL* and *M XI* are abridged, leaving out an important premise. According to the second, the reports in *DL* and *M XI* accurately capture Epicurus' statement of the cradle argument, which was in fact very terse; the terseness left a problem of interpretation, which later Epicureans, and perhaps even Cicero himself, tried to solve by supplying a suppressed premise from among Epicurus' doctrines.

To decide between these two accounts, we can consider how well the reconstruction we find in Cicero fits with other texts we have outlining Epicurean doctrine, and particularly the Epicurean doctrine in question, that the passions function as criteria and guides of goodness. If the texts we have support an understanding of this doctrine that would require stretching it

to make it play the role to which it is put in Cicero's account, then this will be a good reason to suspect the insertion of this doctrine into the argument by later interpreters.

Section Two: The Trouble with Passion

In this section, I review the evidence that Epicurus held a doctrine that the goodness of pleasure and pain is *sensed*. Now Epicurus certainly does say that pleasure and pain are standards of truth, along with sense perception. And he does say that pleasure and pain are the rule that determines goodness and badness. I differentiate, in the case of each claim, a strong and a weak reading. While Cicero's statement of the cradle argument requires the strong reading, only the weak reading of each claim is supported by Epicurus' extant works.

Epicurus' major work on epistemology was his *Kanon*, a work that is lost. Diogenes Laertius, however, provides a very terse summary of the work in his *Life of Epicurus*. For our purposes, the following extract is essential:

Moreover in the *Kanon* Epicurus says that the criteria of truth are sense perception, preconception, and the passions, and the Epicureans add the imaginative applications of the intellect.¹² (*DL* X.31 = *Us.* 35)

¹² ἐν τοίνυν τῷ Κανόνι λέγων ἐστὶν ὁ Ἐπίκουρος κριτήρια τῆς ἀληθείας εἶναι τὰς αἰσθήσεις καὶ προλήψεις καὶ τὰ πάθη, οἱ δ' Ἐπικούρειοι καὶ τὰς φανταστικὰς ἐπιβολὰς τῆς διανοίας

The passions of pleasure and pain appear here among the list of criteria of truth, alongside preconception and the 'imaginative applications of the intellect'.¹³ Although nobody is proposing reading Epicurus' cradle argument as depending on either preconception or the imaginative applications of the intellect, it is worth taking a moment to consider why they are unlikely to play a role in the argument. It would be very surprising if the Epicureans thought that the imaginative applications of the intellect were already functioning at the moment of birth. Similarly, Diogenes tells us about preconceptions that:

they say a preconception is like a grasp or right belief or concept
or a general stored up intellection, and this is the memory of a
thing that has appeared from outside many times¹⁴ (*DL* X.33)

¹³ The translation here is a particularly fraught issue. I am following Elizabeth Asmis' suggestion from her *Epicurus' Scientific Method*: 86–89. Alternative translations include *projection* (Bailey *Extant Remains* 259–274, Cornford, *Principium Sapientiae*: 30, 70, cited by Vlastos, *Studies in Greek Philosophy*: 118) and *impression* (Tohte, *Epikurs Kriterien der Wahrheit*: 20–24, Cited by Bailey, *Extant Remains*: 259), and *attention* (Vlastos, *Studies in Greek Philosophy*: 118; Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*: 29). These different translations correspond to different positions: Tohte and Asmis take the sense here to be intellectual perception (which I discuss below), Cornford takes this to mean the mind's ability to leave the body and investigate things while detached, Bailey a kind of intuitive capacity, and Long and Vlastos as simply intellectual attentiveness. I am following Tohte's reading because, as Bailey agrees, at least this much is well supported by *Letter to Herodotus* 51, where *epibolai* occur as a generalisation of dreaming. I cannot here consider Bailey's further arguments for including an intuitive apprehending of hidden things in detail. Long dismisses Bailey for reading Epicurus in a way incompatible with empiricism, but this is clearly inadequate as Bailey adduces troubling textual evidence in support of his view. To my knowledge, Bailey's arguments have not been adequately answered. If Bailey is correct then the contemporary tendency to read Epicurus as an empiricist is incorrect. While I think an adequate answer to Bailey's arguments is urgently required, this task would easily occupy a full article. It will need to suffice here to point out that on any of these readings, they are not something that we would expect infants to have access to at birth.

¹⁴ Τὴν δὲ πρόληψιν λέγουσιν οἶονεὶ κατάληψιν ἢ δόξαν ὀρθὴν ἢ ἔννοιαν ἢ καθολικὴν νόησιν ἑναποκειμένην, τουτέστι μνήμην τοῦ πολλάκις ἔξωθεν φανέντος

Preconceptions are grasps, or concepts, or the memory of something that has occurred from outside many times. Once again, it is not something at all likely to be available at the moment of birth.¹⁵

The passions of pleasure and pain are, on the other hand, clearly available at birth. And they are criteria. So why couldn't they be what Cicero is talking about when he says that goodness and badness is sensed?

We need to differentiate, in this case, between a strong and a weak reading of the claim that pleasure and pain are criteria of truth. According to the weak reading pleasure and pain are the criteria by which we determine which experiences and activities are pleasant and painful. If we don't posit these as criteria of truth in this weak sense, then it is hard to see how we could come to know, using only the other senses, about the pleasantness and painfulness of things, but Epicurus believes that we have knowledge of this. According to the strong reading, in addition to telling us which things are pleasant and painful, the feelings of pleasure and pain tell us which things are good *in themselves*.

The weak reading is enough to explain Epicurus' claim that pleasure and pain are criteria, but is there any reason to resist a stronger reading? One is that Epicurus will, as we will see later,

¹⁵ This text is hard to reconcile with some other Epicurean doctrines. In particular, Epicureans claimed that we have preconceptions of the gods and of justice. Seeing how these arise from repeated observation is a little difficult, but see David Konstan, "Commentary on Morel". Konstan here suggests that our preconception of the gods comes via mental perception of them. The Epicurean interlocutor Velleius in *De Natura Deorum* claims that our knowledge of the gods is innate (I, 44), but even if this is correct, it's difficult to see how innate preconceptions could constitute a moral *sense*, and if this is what Cicero has in mind his description of the position is highly confusing. For further good discussions of preconception in Epicureanism see Elizabeth Asmis' *Epicurus' Scientific Method*, Cornell University Press, 1984: 63–80, her "Epicurean Epistemology": 276–283, and Pierre-Marie Morel's "Method and Evidence: On Epicurean Preconception."

give an argument that pleasure is the good in the *Ad. Men.* that doesn't appeal to pleasure and pain as criteria: but why would he bother, if they were criteria of the good? Another reason is that there is an awkwardness with claiming that pleasure and pain are a criteria of a thing's intrinsic goodness. We might say, for example, that sight is the criterion of visibility: but if we say this, then we mean that whatever we can see is visible. But in the case of pleasure, Epicurus cannot mean that whatever is pleasant is *intrinsically good*, for it is the experience of pleasure itself, and not the pleasant things, that are intrinsically good. Another way to put this is to try to construct a "see if it's" sentence, which you should usually be able to do for criteria. For visibility, we could say "to see if something's visible, see if it's something you can see" and to determine if something's more than 5kg we could say "to see if it's more than 5kg, see if it is something that will get a reading of more than 5kg on the scale". How is Epicurus supposed to construct such sentences for intrinsic goodness and pleasure? It would have to be: to see if pleasure is good, see if it's pleasant, which is awkward.

Brunschwig, I think, feels this problem when he writes about pleasure's "allure".¹⁶ The idea is that, contained within the experience of pleasure is some kind of indication of its goodness. But, first, then it will be the allure, rather than the pleasure, that acts as criterion on this reading: the "see if it's" sentence is "to see if something's intrinsically good, see if it has a natural allure". And, second, I can't see what this natural allure is, if it's not simply that we are naturally drawn to pleasure. But if this is all that is meant, then the claim that the goodness of pleasure and the badness of pain are 'sensed' could simply be omitted from Cicero's statement of the cradle argument, for the idea of a natural allure is already there in the claim that every creature is drawn to pleasure and repelled by pain from birth. And we

¹⁶ "The Cradle Argument": 124–125.

would still need to explain *why* such a natural allure was a sign of something's being intrinsically good.

Epicurus says that pleasure and pain are the 'rule' by which we determine the goodness and badness of things in the following passage:

For we recognized this as our first and hereditary good, and from this we begin every choice and every avoidance and we return to it again, determining each good with feeling as a rule [*kanoni*]. But even if this is the first good and akin to our nature we do not choose every good because of this but rather we omit many pleasures when much trouble would follow from them to us and we judge many pains to be better than pleasure when more pleasure follows closely for us after a long time, exceeding the pain. So every pleasure, because of having an appropriate nature, is good, but not every pleasure is choiceworthy just as also every pain is bad, but not every pain is always by nature to be fled¹⁷ (*Ad. Men.* 129)

Again, there is a strong and a weak reading of this passage. On the weak reading, the use of pleasure as a rule of what is good is grounded in the claim that pleasure is the good.

¹⁷ ταύτην γὰρ ἀγαθὸν πρῶτον καὶ συγγενικὸν ἔγνωμεν, καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης καταρχόμεθα πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτην καταντῶμεν ὡς κανόνι τῷ πάθει πᾶν ἀγαθὸν κρίνοντες. Καὶ ἐπεὶ πρῶτον ἀγαθὸν τοῦτο καὶ σύμφυτον, διὰ τοῦτο καὶ οὐ πᾶσαν ἡδονὴν αἰρούμεθα, ἀλλ' ἔστιν ὅτε πολλὰς ἡδονὰς ὑπερβαίνομεν, ὅταν πλεῖον ἡμῖν τὸ δυσχερὲς ἐκ τούτων ἔπηται· καὶ πολλὰς ἀλγηδόνας ἡδονῶν κρείττους νομίζομεν, ἐπειδὴν μείζων ἡμῖν ἡδονὴ παρακολουθῇ πολὺν χρόνον ὑπομείνασι τὰς ἀλγηδόνας. πᾶσα οὖν ἡδονὴ διὰ τὸ φύσιν ἔχειν οἰκείαν ἀγαθόν, οὐ πᾶσα μέντοι αἰρετή· καθάπερ καὶ ἀλγηδὼν πᾶσα κακόν, οὐ πᾶσα δὲ ἀεὶ φευκτὴ πεφυκυῖα.

Basically, because pleasure is the only thing good in itself, we determine how good *everything else* is by seeing how pleasant it is. On the strong reading, pleasure also determines how good it itself is. If this is the doctrine at play in the cradle argument, then the strong reading is required.

There are two reasons to prefer the weak reading. The first is that Epicurus states in the same sentence that pleasure is our ‘first and hereditary good’, and that it is the rule that determines every good. In this sentence, neither claim seems to be offered as justification for the other, but the claims rather seem to be two sides of the same coin. The second reason is that when you read further in the passage, the use of pleasure as a rule is explicated further: we don’t just blindly choose every pleasant thing, but carefully weigh up the expected pleasure versus the expected pain, so that we will avoid some pleasures, and choose some pains. Here, pleasure is being used to determine the goodness of things other than pleasure, in the way we would expect on the weak reading. There is nothing in the passage that would indicate the strong reading.

There is, then, a close but imperfect fit between the statement in Cicero’s version of the cradle argument, that the goodness of pleasure is sensed like the sweetness of honey, and Epicurus’ claim that pleasure and pain are criteria. It is frequently the case that philosophers make arguments that later interpreters can only make sense of by making explicit some doctrine of theirs operating as a hidden premise in the argument. It is certainly good practice to try to do this. The imperfect, but close fit we find between the doctrine in Epicurus’ surviving works and the doctrine in the later statement of the cradle argument suggests a reasonable, but failed attempt to do exactly this. If this is right, then it is very good reason

indeed to think the statements in *M XI* and *DL* are closer to Epicurus' actual words than the statement in Cicero. For they both are easier to reconcile with what we know about what Epicurus says elsewhere, and they reveal the problem that would have led a later interpreter to try to provide this doctrine as a suppressed premise. The cradle argument, as stated in *M XI* and *DL*, stands in need of explanation.

But if the cradle argument as Epicurus stated it is puzzling, and if the version we find in Cicero is unlikely to have been how Epicurus understood the argument, then how ought we to make sense of it?

Section Three: The Observation of Desire

In this section I will argue that the Cradle Argument fits into a broader project of critique of our desires. In this project the Epicureans consider three questions about our desires: whether we can avoid having them; whether we can be satisfied without the desires; and whether we will be satisfied when we fulfill them. The desire for pleasure, understood as freedom from pain, is the only desire that strictly speaking meets all three of these criteria. The point of the cradle argument is to establish that we cannot avoid having it.

My strategy in this section will be to explore the discussion of two other kinds of desires in the *DRN*: desires connected with love and sex, and desires connected with luxury. We will

see that in each case, Lucretius makes the point that we can avoid having the desires, either by choosing the circumstances we put ourselves in, or by acquiring proper understanding. Furthermore, having the objects of desire will not lead to satisfaction in the cases of improper desire.

The procedure that Lucretius applies involves a consideration of desires as described in *VS* 71:

It is necessary to place this question to every desire: what will happen to me
if the thing sought in accordance with this desire is achieved, and what if it
is not?¹⁸

In applying this test, the question Lucretius poses is whether satisfaction will arise if the object of the desire is met, and whether it is possible, instead of satisfying the desire, to achieve satisfaction, either by getting rid of the desire, or by avoiding it in the first place.¹⁹ With both the desire for luxury, and the desires that relate to romantic love, Lucretius argues that, even if we get their objects, we won't be satisfied; but that, if we somehow free ourselves of these desires, we can be perfectly satisfied. He argues that, in the case of luxuries, people lived perfectly satisfactory lives before they were invented, and, in the case of the desires for romantic love, the life of a promiscuous single person can be quite satisfactory. Furthermore, both desires can be eliminated through a proper understanding of

¹⁸ πρὸς πάσας τὰς ἐπιθυμίας προσακτέον τὸ ἐπερώτημα τοῦτο· τί μοι γενήσεται ἂν τελεσθῇ τὸ κατὰ τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἐπιζητούμενον; καὶ τί ἔάν μὴ τελεσθῇ;

¹⁹ I am using satisfaction here to mean that we no longer have a desire for something we do not have. When I am hungry, the desire for food is satisfied when I no longer want to eat more than I have. To be satisfied overall is to have no desires for things one does not already have.

their objects – in the case of romantic love, this involves avoiding ‘lovers’ delusions’, where we ignore the faults of people who we love, and imagine we couldn’t live without them; in the case of luxuries, this involves realising that these items will not open up new vistas of pleasure to us.

I will argue that the cradle argument is part and parcel of Epicurus’ application of the same test to the desire for pleasure and the aversion to pain.²⁰ Epicurus argues in *Ad Men.* 128-129 that achieving the object of this desire will lead to satisfaction. But this is, of course, only half the test: we must wonder what happens if we do not achieve the object of the desire, and, in particular, whether the same solution is available for this desire as for the desires for luxury and those associated with romance. The cradle argument gives part of the answer to this question: the desire for pleasure is not one that we can avoid developing, since it is with us from birth. It remains to be shown that once we have it, it cannot be eliminated. I am not aware of any Epicurean argument for this claim, though the claim is plausible enough. And if this is right, we must conclude that the only path to satisfaction is to satisfy the desire for pleasure and the aversion to pain. Since these are the only drives that we ought to try to satisfy, their objects are identified as the good and the bad.

There are two important differences between the desire for pleasure and the aversion to pain, which justifies these desires having a higher status in Epicurus’ moral theory than the others.

²⁰ I do not intend, in constructing this argument, to claim that there is an *epithumia* of pleasure. An anonymous reviewer for *Apeiron* commented on a version of this chapter that *epithumia* should be taken, when used by Epicurus, to mean *appetite*, broadly construed, and that the desire for pleasure also explains why we might desire knowledge of the *cosmos* and friendship, for which there is no appetite. If this is right, then I doubt that Epicurus meant the test outlined in *VS* 71 to apply only to *epithumiai*, but to desire more generally. I am grateful to being alerted that there may be an issue in Epicurus about what can and cannot be the object of an *epithumia*.

The first is that each of the other desires that pass these tests turns out to be itself a desire for something that causes pleasure, or a desire to escape something that causes pain. The second, and more important, is that satisfying the desire for pleasure brings about a state of complete satisfaction, which is not the case in satisfying any of the other desires. It is for this reason that Epicurus appoints it the status of the goal of life: the other proper desires are pursued not so much as means to, but as partial fulfillment of this end.

Lucretius' discussion of sexual and romantic desires occurs in the *DRN IV.1059–1028*. He recommends satisfying sexual desires, and avoiding falling in love:

But the right thing to do is to flee the images and drive away the food of
love, and to turn the mind elsewhere, and to toss the collected liquid into
whatever body²¹ (*DRN IV.1063-5*)

This advice comes at the end of a passage describing human sexual desire as continuous with sexual desire in other animals. It arises inevitably at the age of maturity, often in dreams.²² Lucretius equates sexual desire as the build-up of seed; the desire can be satisfied by eliminating the build-up. Failure to do this, however, will lead to a rapidly growing desire for *something* with a particular person, though the object of this desire is in fact unclear. The desire is not simply for sex with the particular person, and just having sex certainly doesn't satisfy it. Lucretius muses for a while about what the desire *could possibly* be satisfied by: somehow absorbing the beauty of the object? But beauty lies in images, and images are very

²¹ Sed fugitare decet simulacra et pabula amoris / absterrere sibi atque alio convertere mentem / et iacere umorem conlectum in corpora quaeque

²² *DRN 1012–1038*

insubstantial: they cannot fill you up. Are lovers attempting to somehow *remove* the source of their desire by rubbing each other's body? It doesn't seem to help, and there's no reason to think it would. Is the desire to be somehow absorbed by the body of the other? But this is impossible. The desire that grows as a result of sexual thoughts about another person is one that cannot actually be satisfied; that occupies a considerable portion of a person's life.

But, unlike the desire to have sex from time to time, Lucretius argues that erotic love is avoidable. Lucretius suggests two remedies: sexual promiscuity, and distraction. By using these methods we can prevent the onset of erotic love, and protect ourselves from the torments of a desire that is in fact insatiable. Once the desire has set in, however, the cure for it is knowledge, though knowledge is difficult to acquire: what you have to do is avoid idealizing the object of your desire. People tend, according to Lucretius, to ignore all the defects of the objects of their love; keeping these in mind, he thinks, will extinguish erotic love soon enough in most cases. In any cases when this is not enough, we must remember that we got by just fine before the object of our desire came along.

We have outlined the discussion in enough detail to take away what I want from it. There are two desires discussed here: the desire to be freed of a build-up of seed, and the desire to have sex with a particular person. The first is an inevitable result of biology, that affects everyone, and can be satisfied. In contrast, we can avoid developing the second one entirely, and there is no way to satisfy it; however, should we have it, we can get rid of it by thinking clearly about the objects of the desire. Furthermore, simply having the second desire will interfere with our ability to fulfill the other desires we have. This is an argument that the first desire

should be fulfilled, while the second desire should not be, and it's a small step from there to considering the object of the first desire good, but not that of the second desire.

We find the same strategy of comparison in the discussion of luxury in *DRN V*. In *DRN V*, Lucretius outlines a natural history with at least two purposes. The first is to show how the world could have arisen without divine intervention, and so to stave off fear of vengeful gods. The second, however, is to compare earlier phases in the development of civilisation with later phases in its development, and to draw lessons about what does and does not count as progress.²³ One of the central lessons is that ever increasing levels of luxury is not a worthwhile kind of social progress.

Lucretius discusses the history of clothing. He imagines the development of animal pelts as, in a way, a real, but small, step forwards, since they offer protection against the cold. But he argues that when animal pelts were the finest clothing, people desired them in a way that was incommensurate with their actual value. They would, out of envy, attack and murder those wearing animal pelts, often destroying the pelt in the process. The person, in those times, who wore an animal pelt was perfectly satisfied with their clothing, and had no desire for anything further. As the manufacture of clothes improved, however, people began to desire finer and finer clothing, no longer being satisfied with the pelts of animals. But the disproportionate desire for both pelts and fine clothes had a negative impact on people's satisfaction. They

²³ So e.g. Campbell, *Lucretius on Creation and Evolution*, Oxford University Press, 2003: 10; C. Bailey, *Titi Lucreti*. Whether Lucretius had a further, moral project, is debated. D. Furley has argued compellingly that Lucretius' take on civilisation's progress is neither entirely positive nor entirely negative. Whether he was further correct in arguing that an important point in this history is to show the need for Epicurean philosophy and why Epicurus was the greatest inventor, I will leave to one side. See his "Lucretius the Epicurean: On the History of Man".

“make human life busy with cares and wear it out with war.”²⁴ (*DRN V.1423–4*) These desires would be avoidable if one managed not to see the luxurious items, but the real cure to them is understanding the doctrine of the limits of pleasure, that is, that it is true that before people had invented fancy clothes, they could live perfectly satisfied lives.

We find here, again, the same scheme: two different desires are compared. One can be relatively easily satisfied, and is inevitable – that is, the desire not to be cold. Lucretius sees it as reasonable to try to fulfill this desire, perhaps even with an animal pelt, if one can be easily acquired. The other is increasingly difficult to satisfy, and arose only after the invention of clothing, particularly increasingly fine clothing. Having this desire interferes with one’s ability to fulfill other desires, and makes one life care-worn and leads to violence. Furthermore, it can be eliminated by understanding the objects of the desire properly: here, this involves understanding that it is possible to be completely satisfied without animal pelts.

It may sound like Lucretius is applying means-ends reasoning of a sort that depends already on the belief that pleasure is the good. For one might think his arguments are: your life will be more pleasant if you do not desire luxuries, or fall in love. But this is not how he in fact argues. Instead, he argues that you can *avoid having* the desires for luxuries, or the desires that come with romantic love. Furthermore, these desires are impossible to satisfy. Finally, they can be eliminated by a correct understanding of their objects. Lucretius’ argument is that these three features show that we should try to get rid of, rather than to satisfy, these desires.

²⁴ curis / exercent hominum vitam belloque fatigant;

On the reading I am proposing, arguments about the origins of desires such as those found in Lucretius, and including the cradle argument, fill an important argumentative gap left in the *Ad Menoeceus*. The cradle argument does not occur in the *Letter to Menoeceus*. However, there is an argument in the *Letter to Menoeceus* that pleasure is the highest good:

It is necessary to consider²⁵ that of desires, some are natural, some empty, and of natural desires some necessary, others natural only; of necessary desires some are necessary for happiness, others for the freedom of disturbance of the body, others towards life itself. For the steady contemplation of these things knows to refer every choice and avoidance to the health of the body and the untroubledness of the mind, since this is the end of a happy life. For we do everything on account of this, so that we will neither feel pain nor be afraid. When once this arises for us, the whole storm of the soul dissolves, since the living creature does not need to wander in as towards something lacking and to seek something else by which the good of the soul and of the body will be completed. For we have a need for pleasure, when we suffer from pleasure not being there; when we do not suffer, we no longer need pleasure. And because of this we say that pleasure is the beginning and the end of the happy life: for we recognized²⁶ this as our first and hereditary good, and from this we begin every choice

²⁵ The use of *analogisteon* here is a little strange. In Philodemus' *De Signis*, 43, XXVI, analogy is the process of collecting similar cases before extrapolating from them. For a brief discussion of this issue see Pierre-Marie Morel, *Épicure*.

²⁶ The Greek verb here, *gignoskō*, can mean to perceive, but it can also mean simply to learn or recognise, and that is the sense in which I am taking it here. The way I am reading the text, the recognition depends on realising that once we have achieved the limit of pleasure, we are completely satisfied.

and every avoidance and we return to it again, so that we estimate each good with feeling as a measure.²⁷ (*Ad. Men.* 127.8–129.1)

The argument in this passage is that a stable understanding of the classification of desires into natural and empty, and among natural, necessary and not necessary, will enable someone to refer all choice and avoidance to pleasure and pain. Doing this is important, because it will lead us to pursue lack of trouble in the body and calm in the soul.

What we get next is a reason why it is good to pursue lack of trouble in the body and calm in the soul. When we achieve these things, we enter a state of satisfaction: the ‘storm’ of the soul dissolves, and there is no longer any felt need to find anything else. We no longer need pleasure in this state, since we are no longer bothered by its absence.

It’s not clear to me how we ought to read the next step of this inference: we determine, from the fact that we are satisfied by absence of pain, that pleasure is the end.²⁸ There are two paths

²⁷ Ἀναλογιστέον δὲ ὡς τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν αἱ μὲν εἰσι φυσικαί, αἱ δὲ κεναί. καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν αἱ μὲν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ φυσικαὶ μόνον· τῶν δ’ ἀναγκαίων αἱ μὲν πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν εἰσὶν ἀναγκαῖαι, αἱ δὲ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἀοχλησίαν, αἱ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ ζῆν. τούτων γὰρ ἀπλανὴς θεωρία πᾶσαν αἵρεσιν καὶ φυγὴν ἐπανάγειν οἶδεν ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ σώματος ὑγίειαν καὶ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀταραξίαν, ἐπεὶ τοῦτο τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν ἐστὶ τέλος. τούτου γὰρ χάριν πάντα πράττομεν, ὅπως μὴτε ἀλγῶμεν μὴτε ταρβῶμεν· ὅταν δ’ ἅπαξ τοῦτο περὶ ἡμᾶς γένηται,

λύεται πᾶς ὁ τῆς ψυχῆς χειμὼν, οὐκ ἔχοντος τοῦ ζῆν βαδίζειν ὡς πρὸς ἐνδέον τι καὶ ζητεῖν ἕτερον ὃ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ σώματος ἀγαθὸν συμπληρωθήσεται. τότε γὰρ ἡδονῆς χρεῖαν ἔχομεν, ὅταν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ παρῆναι τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀλγῶμεν· ὅταν δὲ μὴ ἀλγῶμεν, οὐκέτι τῆς ἡδονῆς δεόμεθα. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος λέγομεν εἶναι τοῦ μακαρίως ζῆν· ταύτην γὰρ ἀγαθὸν πρῶτον καὶ συγγενικὸν ἔγνωμεν, καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης καταρχόμεθα πάσης αἱρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτην καταντῶμεν ὡς κανόνι τῷ πάθει πᾶν ἀγαθὸν κρίνοντες.

²⁸ The text, at this point, becomes structurally difficult. We get ‘because of this’ (*dia touto*) in the next sentence, and ‘for’ in the following. ‘Because of this’ in Greek can be either forward looking, or back-looking. The presence of *for* in the next sentence would suggest that it is forwards looking, that is, that it means: because of a reason I’m about to give. But if we take it this way, it’s not clear how to

that are reasonable to take: one is to think, with Bailey, that Epicurus is already assuming here the equation of freedom of pain with pleasure. In this case, the thought is that freedom from bodily and psychological pain satisfies us, and this is just pleasure, so pleasure is the good. Or it may be that we observe that people who have satisfied these consider themselves to have no need of further pleasures, and conclude from this that the state is the most pleasant. On this second idea, the argument would be, once you enter this state, you realize that there is no need for any additional pleasures, and that in fact you have achieved all the pleasure that is possible, and so the equation of the highest pleasure with freedom from trouble would be achieved also in this argument. The advantage of Bailey's reading is that it burdens the passage less, but the advantage of the other reading is that it doesn't require Epicurus to assume from the outset something highly doubtful.

Either way, the argument from *Ad. Men.* meets one of the three points according to which desires were compared in the *DRN*: the desire for pleasure, understood as the desire for freedom from trouble and pain, is satisfiable, and by satisfying this desire we can enter a state of satisfaction.

Nevertheless, what we find in the *Ad. Men.* is incomplete, compared to the considerations we got of the desires for luxuries and the desires related for romantic love. For they considered not only how your life went if you tried to satisfy the desire, but how it went if you didn't have the desire at all: could you be satisfied then? The answer, in both cases, was importantly

understand the passage as unified. Instead, I'm taking it as meaning 'because of what I just said', and the subsequent passage to be either a further argument, or a summary of preceding argument.

‘yes’. If this is true of the desire for pleasure as well, then pleasure would seem to be perhaps an indifferent: something we would be just as well off desiring as not desiring.

This is the role, I think, that is partly filled by the cradle argument. By arguing that we have the desire since birth, Epicurus maintains that there is no way we could have avoided having it in the first place. Just as Lucretius attempts to show how the desire for some kind of sexual activity is an inevitable result of our biology, and so is unavoidable, Epicurus does the same with the desire for pleasure, simply by showing that it cannot have been cultivated. In doing so, he provides an answer to people who wonder what life would be like without this desire, namely: it doesn’t matter, such lives don’t exist.

I say it is partly filled by the cradle argument, because the cradle argument doesn’t show that the desire for pleasure cannot be removed, or at least, that it cannot be removed through achieving a better understanding of pleasure. Part of Epicurus’ answer will be that Epicureans in possession of the foremost scientific understanding and clearest grasp on the nature of pleasure still desire it. But this answer is also incomplete, because it doesn’t speak of other means of removing the desire for pleasure. Although it is an incomplete part of the answer, it is also an important part of it: for it is only because the desire for pleasure is universally innate that there are no people without the desire for pleasure whose satisfaction the Epicureans would need to investigate.

The account I have given here provides only an auxiliary role to the cradle argument, but this is perhaps a virtue of the account. While Cicero has Torquatus open his discussion of Epicurean ethics with a statement of the cradle argument, it is oddly missing from Epicurus’

Ad. Men. This suggests that the cradle argument came later to occupy, among some Epicureans, greater importance than it did in Epicurus' hands. Even in Cicero, the role of the argument is a little odd: it is supposed to be Epicurus' only argument that pleasure is the highest good, but we retain a different one in the *Ad. Men.* And it is certainly only a small part of Torquatus' case.

If we understand the cradle argument as I am suggesting, we can see very well why Epicurus didn't see it as needing any additional premises. The argument is only one part of an overall process of evaluating desires: the property of being an unavoidable desire is one that falls consistently on the side of those that are good, as with the appetites for food, drink, and sex: it is a perfectly standard part of his procedure. It is a mistake to elevate the cradle argument, in Epicurus' hands, as Cicero does, to an argument that pleasure is *the good*: as we have seen, this point requires further argument.

Conclusion

This concludes the first part of the section on Epicurus. If my reading is correct, Epicurus relied exclusively on observations about what it would take to satisfy a person in arguing that pleasure was the good. Unlike Plato and Aristotle, he depends on no claims about the properties an object might have, and unlike Seneca, he depends on no innate capacity for recognizing goodness. In a world in which the universe is disordered and gods do not care about us, it is difficult to see why we should have such an innate capacity.

Seneca, Plato and Aristotle could of course argue with Epicurus by rejecting his empirical premises. But they should feel able to argue against him on the grounds that his life was lacking in something, perhaps the proper kind of connection to something higher. For Seneca, Plato and Aristotle, the idea of a satisfaction which is complacent is a possibility, for Epicurus, it is not.

It is in this idea of the possibility of a complacent satisfaction that we feel the rift in methodologies most strongly. Epicurus would not have felt the pressure from arguments from analogy, that according to him, his life had nothing that animals lacked; he would not have trusted the results of Senecean reflection; it is unlikely that he would have trusted many of Socrates' arguments from the *Philebus* over what he saw as his cool and clear observation, and similarly with Aristotle. In the framework of Epicurus' methodology, there is nothing for the idea that something is missing from a perfectly satisfying life to get a grip on.

But, similarly, Aristotle, Plato and Seneca thought that they could study the good independently from the effects of our desires, and the conditions under which we had them. And once this is accepted, the idea of complacent satisfaction becomes a real possibility. It doesn't matter how much Epicurus insists that he and his students are quite satisfied; the idea that it can be *shown* that their lives are missing something would have been unshakeable by any argument among Epicurus'.

In the next chapter, we will enlarge this sketch of Epicurus' methodology by showing how it applies to the Epicurean arguments about the fear of death; here, again, we find Epicurus and

Lucretius depending exclusively on observation to construct their moral case: observations about death and its nature, and observations about the conditions under which death is feared.

~Epicurus~

The Fears that Knowledge Dissipates

In the previous chapter, I argued that the Cradle Argument fit into an overall pattern of Epicurean arguments about what was, and wasn't, good. This pattern of argument involves studying the persistence, origin conditions and satisfiability of desires and drives. The desire for pleasure, like the desire for sexual release, is inevitable and, unchangeable, and satisfiable. In that chapter, I put aside discussion of Epicurus' arguments about the fear of death. In this chapter, my aim to show is that, at least in Lucretius and Epicurus, these arguments also fit this overall, empirically-minded, approach to studying the good.

My main claim, then, will be that Epicurus and Lucretius do not, in fact, ever argue directly that death is not bad for us: rather, their arguments about death work to stabilise and deepen the conviction that there is no afterlife. They claim that the fear of death is only present for those who have not fully accepted that there is no afterlife. For this reason, death is not something to be feared – and we might say, is not bad.

People who are used to approaching the Epicurean arguments through the lens of analytic philosophy should find this description of the arguments striking. For they are familiar with a

reconstruction of these arguments according to which Epicurus offers two direct arguments about death's value. The first argument, known as the *no-subject-of-harm* argument, runs as follows: harms can only apply to people who exist; when we are dead, we do not exist; so being dead does not constitute a harm to us. The second argument, known as the symmetry argument, goes something like this: the time before our birth was not bad for us; the time after our death will be, so far as we are concerned, just like the time before our birth; so (by analogy) the time after our death will not be bad for us.¹ If this is the right way to read the arguments, then Epicurus and Lucretius do indeed directly draw conclusions about the goodness and badness of things by simply considering what the things are like, without any reference to the conditions under which we desire them.

Scholars familiar with the issues involved in interpreting Lucretius and Epicurus, however, will realise that I am supporting one side of the divide in the literature. The divisive issue is the following: in the texts in which these arguments supposedly appear, Lucretius and Epicurus do not literally say “death is not bad for us” but rather “death is nothing to us”. But “death is nothing to us” could just as well mean: so far as we are concerned, death is not

¹ For discussions of the implications of these arguments see Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*; Nagel, “Death” in his *Mortal Questions*: 1-10; Bradley, *Well-Being and Death*; M. Guyau, *Le morale d'Épicure*.

something, or death doesn't relate to us at all.² Compelling readings of the relevant passages are available no matter which way you take the statement.

Although the secondary literature is divided on this issue, there has been no satisfactory attempt on either side to try to explain why they opted to read the arguments the way they did. Furthermore, because scholars looking to give a thorough discussion of the philosophical issues posed by the text exclusively read "death is nothing to us" as meaning "death is not bad to us", there has been no deep discussion of the philosophical possibilities offered by the alternative reading. This chapter seeks to address both those issues: I consider the evidence for each of the alternative readings, and argue that it favours reading "death is nothing to us" as meaning "death doesn't relate to us at all". And I offer a discussion of the philosophical issues around taking this reading.

There are two main advantages of taking the reading I suggest. The first is that, when we take the traditional reading of these arguments, *DRN III* seems to place the weight of the argument in the wrong place. People will readily accept the claim that the soul is mortal, and the difficult thing is to convince them that, given this, death is not bad for us. Yet most of *DRN III*, ostensibly about the fear of death, goes to arguing for the soul's mortality. But according

² The phrase has been taken in both ways by various commentators. Nickel translates this phrase as "der Tod hat keine Bedeutung für uns" – death has no importance for us. (*Weg Zum Glück*) Warren takes it to mean that "death does not constitute a harm for us". (*Facing Death*: 17) Preuss, on the other hand, takes it as a restriction of the conclusion of an earlier argument that death does not exist. (See *Facing Death*: 52–53) Preuss thinks that the "to us" allows for the objection that the people who survive us might be aware of our death, and that our death may have very real impacts on their experience, and that otherwise the claim should simply be read as "death does not exist". (*Epicurean Ethics: Katastematic Hedonism*). Most commentators, including these two, do not seem to be aware that they are taking stands on a controversial issue. Salem, however, provides a very interesting overview of different options for translating the phrase, including some (relatively superficial) arguments in favour of something close to Preuss' reading. (Salem, *Tel un Dieu Parmi les Hommes: L'Éthique d'Épicure*: 204–227) I discuss Salem in more detail below.

to my reading, the whole of *DRN III* is motivated by the psychological thought that, although people readily accept that there is no afterlife, they lack real conviction in this claim, and this lack of real conviction is the cause of their fear of death. The arguments throughout the whole of *DRN III* are aimed at securing real conviction. The second is that this offers a more compelling account of how the Epicureans dealt with the fear of death. The Epicurean arguments, as traditionally understood, are philosophically clever, but it is frankly difficult to imagine anyone's fear of death evaporating on reading them, or even fully internalising them.

³ According to my reading, we at least get a clear account from the Epicureans of what they thought the cause of the fear of death was, and why they thought it could be treated with argument.

Section One: Ambiguity in the Key Texts

My purpose in this section is to show that the most central texts in which Epicurus and Lucretius present arguments for the claim that "death is nothing to us" are ambiguous. On one reading, they present the no-subject-of-harm argument and the symmetry argument, and on the other reading, they do not. Deciding which reading to take is difficult, and the balance of considerations that arises from the texts does not speak in favour of either reading.

³ In his *Facing Death: Epicurus and his Critics*: 4, James Warren distinguishes between four distinct fears of death: the fear of being dead; the fear that one will die, that one's life is going to end; the fear of premature death; fear of the process of dying. The Epicurean arguments I am discussing deal exclusively with the fear of being dead. I agree with Warren that the Epicureans had other arguments for addressing the other fears.

These two readings depend on two different ways of reading the phrase “death is nothing to us”. In Greek, the key word is the preposition *pros*. *Pros* has many meanings, but in this phrase it almost certainly means “death is nothing in relation to us”. But what does this mean? One possible meaning is that death is irrelevant for us, in the sense of being neither good nor bad for us. Epictetus uses the phrase ‘nothing to us’ to mean what the Stoics call *indifferents*, and this may be the sense in which Epicurus is using the phrase as well.⁴ Call this the *evaluative reading*.

On the other hand, the text can be given what I call an *ontological reading*. According to an ontological reading, the claim is not about death’s value, but about its nature. Salem offers two alternatives for rendering the text ontologically. One is to translate it as “death is, with respect to us, nothing”, taking the *pros* as indicating perspective. Taken this way, the claim is *perspectival*, implying that death is quite literally nothing from our point of view; it would mean that being dead is something that happens to other people, except it doesn’t. A second is to render it as “death is nothing in relation to us”, in line with Lucretius’ “does not reach us at all” (*neque pertinet hilum, DRN III.830*). This rendering would place emphasis on the fact that being dead isn’t really something that happens to us.⁵ Readers who take this route should take the phrase as a somewhat loose expression of the idea that there is no afterlife: the core idea is that we experience nothing after we are dead, and do not exist either. By afterlife here I mean to include conventional pictures of the afterlife, with Hades and the Styx, but also less robust views of post-death existence, such as that implicit in imagining our funeral and feeling sad. I will use the translation “death is nothing in relation to us” to represent the family of ontological readings.

⁴ See e.g. *Dissertationes ab Arriano digestae*, I.13.2

⁵ J. Salem, *L’Éthique d’Épicure*, pp. 208-210.

We will now turn to the relevant texts to see if they allow us to decide between the two readings of the formula. The first text is from Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus*:

Accustom yourself to believing that death is nothing to us. For all good and evil is in sensation. Death is however the privation of sensation. Thus the right knowledge of death being nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not by providing infinite time, but by taking away the desire for immortality.⁶⁷

(*Ad Men.* 124)

The text might look reasonably straightforward, but there are in fact two important decisions that must be made, and these both occur in the first sentence. The first decision is whether to take the imperative “accustom yourself” as a rhetorical flourish, or at face value. A lot hangs on this. If we take it as a rhetorical flourish, then we would expect an argument for the claim that “death is nothing to us” to come next. If, however, we take it at face value, we would expect an explanation of why it is a good idea to accustom ourselves to believing that “death is nothing to us”. The second interpretative decision is about how to understand the phrase “death is nothing to us”. As I mentioned above, this could be a statement about death’s value, namely: death is not bad for us. Or it could be a statement about death’s nature, namely: death is nothing in relation to us.

⁶ Συνέθιζε δὲ ἐν τῷ νομίζειν μηδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς εἶναι τὸν θάνατον· ἐπεὶ πᾶν ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν ἐν αἰσθήσει· στέρησις δὲ ἐστὶν αἰσθήσεως ὁ θάνατος. ὅθεν γινώσκεις ὀρθῇ τοῦ μηθὲν εἶναι πρὸς ἡμᾶς τὸν θάνατον ἀπολαυστὸν ποιεῖ τὸ τῆς ζωῆς θνητόν, οὐκ ἄπειρον προστιθεῖσα χρόνον, ἀλλὰ τὸν τῆς ἀθανασίας ἀφελομένη πόθον.

⁷ In his *Epicurean Ethics*, Preuss, adducing Axiochus 369B, claims that this argument originates with Prodicus, and was originally an argument that death was non-existence.

The first reading depends on taking the “accustom yourself” as a rhetorical flourish, and the phrase “death is nothing to us” as a statement about death’s value, and the argument that follows makes sense if we make these decisions. First, Epicurus argues that death cannot be bad, for all bad things are in sensation, and death is the privation of sensation. Then, Epicurus explains why this argument is important. The belief that death is not bad for us could be justified in two different ways: by showing that we had a good afterlife, or by convincing us that non-existence is not bad. Since Epicurus has taken the second route, the belief that death is not bad for us helps us enjoy life by “taking away the desire for immortality” rather than “providing infinite time”. The justification of the proposition here plays an important role in its psychological impact.

This first way of reading the text is not, however, flawless. The problem with it is that it is the role these arguments need to play in Epicurean ethics. Hedonism can be broken down into two sets of claims, call them the attribution and the uniqueness claims. The attribution claims are that pleasure is good and pain is bad. The uniqueness claim is that nothing else is good or bad, except insofar as it brings with it pleasure and pain. The Epicureans use the cradle argument to establish the attribution claim, but arguments for the uniqueness claim are surprisingly lacking. In *De Finibus*, Cicero reports that the Epicureans were concerned to show that virtue and friendship lead to pleasure, and that their goodness resided in their capacity to do so.⁸ The reason they did this was that they needed to make the case for the uniqueness claim against the objection that friendship and virtue appear to be good in themselves. In a similar way, the Epicureans need to be able to maintain the uniqueness

⁸ I.37

claims in face of the objection that being dead appears to be bad, and indeed worse than being alive and experiencing neither pleasure nor pain. If this is right, then it would be surprising to find Epicurus appealing to the uniqueness claims in an argument for death's neutrality: where does he argue for the uniqueness claims so convincingly that they overcome this objection?

We can make the interpretative decisions differently. Instead of taking "accustom yourself" as being a rhetorical flourish, we can take it at face value, and instead of taking "death is nothing to us" to be a claim about death's value, we can take it to be a claim about death's nature. With these decisions made, the text becomes a piece of practical advice: we need to get used to thinking about death as something that is nothing in relation to us. Epicurus justifies this advice in two steps. It's easiest to see how this argument works if we start from the end, with the claim that the belief that we do not come into contact with death takes away the desire for immortality, and so makes the mortality of life enjoyable. To justify this claim, he needs to explain how the belief that death does not relate to us does this. The middle lines of the passage provide this explanation. Because we are in the context of a psychological explanation, we can understand the quantifier in 'all good and evil is in sensation' as meaning 'all good and evil you associate with death is in sensation'.⁹ If that's right, then it explains why seeing death as a privation of sensation removes the fear of it.

This provides a way for the Epicureans to answer the objection to the uniqueness claims that death appears to be bad. They can argue that it only appears this way to people who do not understand death's nature. The people who have fully accustom themselves to thinking that

⁹ The Epicureans certainly believed the stronger claim that all good and evil was in sensation. But as I mentioned in the previous paragraph, the premise is dialectically unavailable here. The weaker claim, which here doesn't receive the justification it requires, can be used here without making the argument circular.

it does not relate to them do not fear it. So death provides no real reason to doubt the uniqueness claim. Certainly, this psychological claim is dubious. But it's one the Epicureans seem to have believed, and on this reading the passage provides part of their support for the uniqueness claims, support that they otherwise seem to lack.

As with the first option we considered, the second has a cost. The cost is that the work we did with the quantifiers requires us to see Epicurus' statement of his argument as unclear. In this regard, the second option is clearly inferior to the first option, where Epicurus has made his argument clear enough. Again, though, great philosophers often put their arguments unclearly. The interpreter of this passage is then faced with a choice. Either interpret the Epicureans so that they leave the uniqueness claims without an adequate defence, or attribute to Epicurus the very common stylistic vice of unclarity. This is a decision about which reasonable interpreters can reasonably differ, and in which one's own vices and pet peeves will guide one's judgement. I am disinclined to resort to table-thumping, and think the sane thing to do with the text is to describe the ambiguity, and look for clues elsewhere as to how to resolve it. If it is unresolvable with the extant evidence, better to admit it and offer a diagnosis of the problem than to attempt to carry the day through truculence.

The next important text occurs shortly later in the *Ad. Men.*:

Thus vain is the person who says that they feared death not because it will cause pain to them when it is present, but because it causes them pain when it is going to be there. For that which does not trouble when it is present, causes pain to

the person who expects it in vain. Again/therefore [*oun*] the most chilling of all evils death is nothing to us, for whenever we exist, death is not present, and when death is present, then we do not exist. Thus it is neither something to the living nor something to the dead, for in the case of the living it is not, and in the case of the dead they are no longer.¹⁰ (*Ad Men 125*)

Again, we must decide on how we understand the phrase ‘death is nothing to us’: according to the evaluative, or to the ontological, reading. Standardly, this passage is translated in such a way as to indicate an inference from the argument that fearing death for the pain that it will cause in anticipation is vain, to the conclusion that death is nothing to us. If such an inference exists, this passage favours the evaluative reading. If fear of death on the basis of its anticipation is empty, this gives us some reason to think death is not bad for us; it is hard to see how this could be evidence that death doesn’t stand in a robust relationship to us.

The reason there appears to be an inference here is because scholars translate the greek word ‘*oun*’ with *therefore*. This is something that *oun* often means. But *oun* can also mark a resumption of a discussion after a digression.¹¹ The latter reading works well in this context: Epicurus has just answered an objection, and is returning to his positive argument.

¹⁰ ὥστε μάταιος ὁ λέγων δεδιέναι τὸν θάνατον οὐχ ὅτι λυπήσει παρών, ἀλλ' ὅτι λυπεῖ μέλλον. ὃ γὰρ παρὸν οὐκ ἐνοχλεῖ, προσδοκώμενον κενῶς λυπεῖ. τὸ φρικωδέστατον οὖν τῶν κακῶν ὁ θάνατος οὐθὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ἐπειδήπερ ὅταν μὲν ἡμεῖς ὦμεν, ὁ θάνατος οὐ πάρεστιν, ὅταν δὲ ὁ θάνατος παρῇ, τόθ' ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἐσμέν. οὔτε οὖν πρὸς τοὺς ζῶντας ἐστὶν οὔτε πρὸς τοὺς τετελευτηκότας, ἐπειδήπερ περὶ οὓς μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν, οἳ δ' οὐκέτι εἰσίν.

¹¹ For this usage, see e.g. J.D Denniston, *The Greek Particles*: 428; Des Places, *Études sur quelques particules de liaison chez Platon*, Les Belles Lettres, 1929, usage II.5. C.M.J Sicking subsumes this under his general account of *oun* as marking what precedes the *oun* as relevant, and subsidiary, to what follows, in his “Devices for text Articulation in Lysias I and XII”.

Furthermore, he immediately gives a further, positive argument, for his central claim, that ‘death is nothing to us’, an argument that follows effortlessly on the ontological reading.

But what could the objection be, if we take the ontological reading of ‘death is nothing to us’? The objector seems to be largely accepting that death doesn’t stand in any kind of robust relationship with us, where it could affect us directly. And they’re certainly not claiming that there is an afterlife.

Again, the supporter of the ontological reading takes the text at face value. The objection is that Epicurus has misidentified the cause of the fear of death. The objector’s claim is that accustoming ourselves to the idea that death is nothing to us won’t cure us because of the fear of death, because it doesn’t remove the cause of the fear of death. The cause of the fear of death is, in fact, bad feelings we have about dying while we are still alive, perhaps the very intense sense of loss we might expect to feel in the moments directly preceding death.

We would then read Epicurus’ answer as a psychological one. The point is not that people are irrational to worry about what won’t hurt them when it’s present, but, rather, if they are really certain that something won’t hurt them when it’s present, the anticipation of it won’t be painful either (and by the same argument, neither will anticipation of the anticipation). Therefore, the cause of the fear of death *is* belief that death stands in some robust relation to us, or that there is some kind of afterlife. With this point answered, proving the claim that death is nothing to us can resume.

This passage is open, then, both to the ontological and to the evaluative readings of the claim that death is nothing to us. There is little reason I can see from this passage alone to prefer either reading: the ontological reading does slightly better justice to the fact that Epicurus literally states the problem as being between two competing explanations for fearing death, but this is not a decisive consideration.

The third, and final text to consider is from Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*. It is in this text that the symmetry argument is widely thought to be found:

Thus death is nothing to us and it does not concern us in the least, since the nature of our minds is mortal. And just as in the time past we felt nothing bad, with the Carthaginians coming from all over in order to fight, when everything shook with the horrid blows and restless tumult of war beneath the high air and winds and when it was doubted by all people to which kingdom the seas and earth would fall so, when we will not be, when there will be a separation of our body and our soul from where we are fastened as one, there will be nothing at all that can approach us, who will not then be, or move the sense, not if the earth and the sea and the sea and the sky were blended together.¹²

(*DRN III*.830–842)

¹² Nil igitur mors est ad nos neque pertinet hilum, / quandoquidem natura animi mortalis habetur. / et velut anteacto nil tempore sensimus aegri, / ad confligendum venientibus undique Poenis, / omnia cum belli trepido concussa tumultu / horrida contremuere sub altis aetheris auris, / in dubioque fuere utrorum ad regna cadendum / omnibus humanis esset terraque marique, / sic, ubi non erimus, cum corporis atque animai / discidium fuerit quibus e sumus uniter apti, / scilicet haud nobis quicquam, qui non erimus tum, / accidere omnino poterit sensumque movere, / non si terra mari miscebitur et mare caelo.

Here again we must make the decision about how to read the phrase ‘death is nothing to us’, and again, there is nothing in the text to recommend either reading over the other. But we do have to take the analogy between the time after our death and the time after our birth somewhat differently depending on which way we decide to read the phrase ‘death is nothing to us’. If we read this as meaning ‘death is not bad for us’, then we ought to take the analogy as providing evidence on the basis of similarity.¹³ The idea would be that death is not bad for us, because the time before our birth was not bad for us, and the time after our death is sufficiently similar to the time before our birth. This reading is not available if we read the phrase ‘death is nothing to us’ as meaning that we do not come into contact with our death. If we read it that way, the analogy is an illustration. The time before we were born is brought in because we think about bad things that happened during it in the right way: we see even something as bad as the Carthaginian invasion of Italy as being something that did not affect us, because we did not exist. The way we think about things that happened before our birth is the same way we should think about things that happen after our death, and this includes the fact of being dead. Whereas on the traditional reading, the comparison is between our experience of the time before our birth and the time after our death, in the alternative reading the comparison is between events that happened before our birth, such as the Carthaginian invasion, and our being dead, which happens after our death. We should think of our being dead as having the same relation – namely, no relation at all – to us as the invasion, and if we think about it that way, we will not be afraid of it.

¹³ Indeed, R. Heinze captures the spirit of this way of reading the passage when he writes “hiermit beginnt L., die praktischen Folgerungen zu ziehen, auf die es ihm bei der ganzen Seelenlehre wesentlich ankommt”. (With this, Lucretius starts to draw out the practical conclusions, which were the point of the whole teaching on the soul) (*De Rerum Natura III*: 162) According to the alternative reading, Lucretius is here drawing *no practical conclusions*, but illustrating the theoretical conclusion in such a way as to make it sufficiently well understood that it will have the calming effects that Lucretius hoped for.

The illustration is a good one. I have no trouble imagining that things before my birth had no effect on me at all; I do have some trouble imagining this about things after my death, and so, if Epicurus is right, in my case my attitude to things that happened before my birth might well be a good model for the attitude I should adopt to things that happen after my death. But in any case, there is a sensible reading of the analogy no matter which way you interpret the sentence “death is nothing to us”, and only one of these readings suggests that there is an argument here about the value of death.

We are thus met with an interpretative puzzle. Each of these texts is open to multiple readings, and there is no way within the texts to decide between the readings. On some of the readings, the texts contain the Epicurean arguments about death’s value; on other readings, they do not. We must look beyond the texts themselves to resolve this problem, and to see if the Epicureans really did make the famous arguments about death’s value.

Section Two: The Translation of *Death is Nothing to Us*

The purpose of this section is to consider further uses by Epicurus and Lucretius of the phrase “death is nothing to us”. Does it mean that death is not bad for us, or does it mean that death does not relate to us? We will see that all surviving uses of the construction by Epicurus are compatible with both readings. There is one passage in Lucretius where it is slightly better to interpret “death is nothing to us” as meaning that we do not come into contact with death, but this advantage is not decisive.

In Epicurus' surviving writings, the phrase "death is nothing to us" occurs two further times, aside from the instances we have considered. It occurs in *KD II*:

Death is nothing to us. For that which is dissolved lacks sense perception, and that which lacks sense perception is nothing to us.¹⁴

It also occurs in *KD XI*:

If misconceptions about astronomical matters and those [misconceptions] about death,¹⁵ that it is something to us, did not disturb us, and neither did not understanding the limits of pleasures and of sufferings, then we would have no use of natural science.¹⁶

These texts are both rather difficult. However, I think that good sense can be made out of both of them using both interpretations of the phrase "is nothing to us". The phrase "is nothing to us" is therefore ambiguous in what remains of Epicurus' writing: it can legitimately be taken on either interpretation that I've suggested.

¹⁴ Ὁ θάνατος οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς· τὸ γὰρ διαλυθὲν ἀναισθητεῖ, τὸ δ' ἀναισθητοῦν οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς.

¹⁵ The translation of this phrase is difficult. μήποτε introduces a subordinate clause, but it's not clear what it depends on. I am reading it as depending on misconceptions, following Hicks' translation of DL. Bailey supplies an implicit verb of fearing.

¹⁶ Εἰ μὴθὲν ἡμᾶς αἱ τῶν μετεώρων ὑποψίαι ἠνώχλουν καὶ αἱ περὶ θανάτου, μήποτε πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἢ τι, ἔτι τε τὸ μὴ κατανοεῖν τοὺς ὅρους τῶν ἀλγηδόνων καὶ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν, οὐκ ἂν προσεδεόμεθα φυσιολογίας.

The evaluative interpretation of *KD II* offers the following paraphrase:

Death is not bad for us. For that which is dissolved lacks sense perception, and that which lacks perception is not bad for us.

It's not immediately clear what this might mean. Knives, stones, and thunderstorms can cause us to suffer, yet lack sense perception. Thus a hedonist cannot believe that things which lack sense perception are not bad for us. The Greek prohibits reading Epicurus' claim as meaning "that which we do not perceive is not bad for us". The most promising strategy seems to be to restrict the domain of quantification of the claim "that which lacks perception is not bad for us" to a class of things across which it is true, and within which death falls. A good candidate for doing this would be 'states of the soul, broadly construed'. I say 'broadly construed' to avoid the complaint that, if death is a soul's annihilation, it's a little strange to describe it as being a *state* of the soul. On this reading, Epicurus' claim would be that those states of the soul in which we don't have any sense perception are not bad for us, and death is one of these states, since it is a state of dissolution for the soul. So understood, the text makes good sense.

The paraphrase of *KD II* according to the ontological reading is as follows:

We have no experience of death. For that which is dissolved lacks sense perception, and that which lacks perception does not relate to us.

The alternative reading has the same problem as the classical reading. Chairs, tables, and rain relate to us, and yet they lack sense perception. Nevertheless, the same restriction works: if

the second conjoint is assumed to be about states of the soul, broadly construed, then we can make sense of the claim that they do not relate to us. We are completely unaware of them. *KD II* therefore makes good sense on the alternative reading as well.

KD XI gives clean readings no matter which way we understand the phrase “death is nothing to us”. On the evaluative reading, we have:

If misconceptions about astronomical matters and those [misconceptions] about death, that it is either good or bad for us, did not disturb us, and neither did failing to understand the limits of pleasures and of sufferings, then we would have no use of natural science.¹⁷

The evaluative reading is a little uncomfortable here. The evaluative reading is that death is neither good nor bad for us. The misconception here is simply presented as the negation of this claim. But, if the evaluative reading is the right way to go, then Epicurus thought the problem lay in people thinking that death is bad for us, and so it’s a little inaccurate for him to describe the misconception about death as being that it is “either good for us or bad for us”, in the sense that it has some importance for us, either good or bad. The reading is not, however, impossible.

The ontological reading provides the following paraphrase:

¹⁷ Εἰ μὴθὲν ἡμᾶς αἱ τῶν μετεώρων ὑποψίαι ἠνώχλουν καὶ αἱ περὶ θανάτου, μὴ ποτε πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἦ τι, ἔτι τε τὸ μὴ κατανοεῖν τοὺς ὅρους τῶν ἀλγηδόνων καὶ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν, οὐκ ἂν προσεδεόμεθα φυσιολογίας.

If misconceptions about astronomical matters and those [misconceptions] about death, that it relates to us, did not disturb us, and neither did failing to understand the limits of pleasures and of sufferings, then we would have no use of natural science.

The ontological reading is again slightly more comfortable. According to the ontological reading, the misconceptions about death are indeed that it relates to us in some way, in the sense that it falls into the domain of our experience. And these are precisely the misconceptions that natural science, according to Epicurus, can address.

A final text to consider is the second statement of the symmetry argument in Lucretius. Again, in this text, both readings are possible. The text in question is:

Again, look back at how the ages before we were born were nothing to us for an eternal time. This then [*igitur*] offers a reflection¹⁸ of the nature of our time after our death. What awful thing appears there, or does anything seem sad, does it not exceed all sleep in peacefulness?¹⁹ (*DRN* III.972–977)

According to the evaluative reading, we can substitute as follows:

¹⁸ Here I am following E.J. Kenney, who points out that “exponit” sits uncomfortably with the translation of ‘speculum’ as a mirror. (*De Rerum Natura* III: 220)

¹⁹ respice item quam nil ad nos anteacta vetustas / temporis aeterni fuerit, quam nascimur ante. / hoc igitur speculum nobis natura futuri / temporis exponit post mortem denique nostram. / numquid ibi horribile apparet, num triste videtur / quicquam, non omni somno securius exstat?

Again, look back at how the ages before we were born were not bad for us for an eternal time. This then [*igitur*] offers a reflection of the nature of our time after our death. What awful thing appears there, or does anything seem sad, does it not exceed all sleep in peacefulness?

The *gist* of the text seems clear enough. Because the time before our birth was not bad for us, and the time after our death is relevantly similar, the time after our death will not be bad for us. It is the standard symmetry argument, introducing an analogy between the time before birth and the time after death.²⁰

The alternative reading provides the following substitution:

Again, look back at how, the ages before we were born did not relate to us for an eternal time. This then [*igitur*] offers a reflection of the nature of our time after our death. What awful thing appears there, or does anything there seems sad, does it not exceed all sleep in peacefulness?

²⁰ On this reading it is necessary to read the '*igitur*' non-inferentially. I take it this is what Bailey, Kenney (*De Rerum Natura III*), and Heinze (*De Rerum Natura III*) do, since they don't mention it in their commentaries. (C. Bailey, *Titi Lucreti*). In his *Titi Lucretii Cari* Creech doesn't mention it in paraphrasing the argument: Considera quam Nihil ad Nos fuit Tempus illud aeternum, quod ante Nos natos effluxit, & in hoc intueri potes quam nihil ad Nos tempus post Mortem nostram futurum. (Consider how that eternal time, which flowed before our birth, was nothing to us, and in this you can see that the time after our death will be nothing to us). Guyau skips the 'therefore' entirely in his translation of this passage, presumably taking *igitur* in a very weak progressive sense. "Vois combien nous nous est indifférent l'éternité passée, qui fut avant que nous naissions. C'est le miroir où la nature nous montre les temps futurs..." (*L'Éthique d'Épicure*: 111)

At this point in *De Rerum Natura III*, Lucretius has already taken considerable effort to show that the soul perishes with the body, and that therefore we have no experience of death. Pointing out that we have no experience of the time before our birth therefore is enough to ground the claim that the time before birth is a ‘mirror’ for the time after death. Thus, if we take the ontological reading, but not the evaluative reading, it is possible to read *igitur* inferentially. I see this as a small advantage, since it removes a small redundancy from the text: if we take the evaluative reading, “the ages before we were born were not bad for us” does much the same work as “what awful thing [...] peacefulness”, whereas if we take the ontological reading, the two do different work: “the ages before we were born do not relate to us” justifies the claim that the time before we were born is similar to the time after death, and “what awful thing [...] peacefulness” draws our attention to further attributes we can allocate to the time after death on the basis of this similarity. As always, however, this reason is not decisive.

Note that on this reading, Lucretius is not directly arguing that death is not bad for us. Rather, he is offering an illustrative analogy.²¹ The time before birth offers a ‘reflection’ of what the time after death will be like, in the sense that if you want to see what the time after death will be like, you can use your ideas of what the time before birth was like. Certainly, Lucretius thinks that this will help you to overcome your fear of death. Perhaps he even thinks it will help you to stop thinking of death as bad. But according to this reading of the passage, there is no evidence that he’s trying to provide anything like a *ground* for the belief that death is not bad.

²¹ Heinze, although he offers the standard reconstruction of this text, claims that the argument has an emphasis on the imagination for the purposes of changing feelings. (*De Rerum Natura III*: 183)

We have seen, then, that the phrase ‘death is nothing to us’ admits of two readings in Epicurus’ work. Can we find any reason for preferring one over the other? I argue in the next section that the overall approach in *De Rerum Natura III* speaks strongly in favour of taking the ontological reading.

Section Three: Epicurus and the Fear of Death

Although the texts in which the phrase “death is nothing to us” occur give us little evidence to decide between the ontological and the evaluative readings of this phrase, Lucretius’ overall approach in *De Rerum Natura III* gives us good reason to prefer the ontological reading. In this section I will argue that *De Rerum Natura III* is best read as an attempt to get readers to accustom themselves to thinking that ‘death is nothing to us’, in the ontological sense.²² Lucretius emphasises that the cause of the fear of death is belief that something happens after death. In the closing sections of *De Rerum Natura III*, he discusses people who, although they *say* they know that there is no afterlife, nevertheless think about the time after death in a way that presupposes their continued existence. This suggests that Lucretius mentions the time before our birth as a positive model of how to think about the time after our death *without* presupposing that we continue to exist, rather than as an argument that death is not bad.

Lucretius describes his mission in *De Rerum Natura III* in this text:

²² Nickel describes Epicurus’ strategy in more or less this way (*Weg Zum Glück*, pp. 309–311). He does not, however, seem to be aware that in offering such a reading, he is saying something controversial, and neither works it out in much detail nor seeks to defend it against alternative readings.

And following this matter it seems necessary now to make clear the nature of the soul and the mind with my verse, and to drive out headlong that fear of Acheron which disturbs human life from the depths, pouring the blackness of death over everything and leaving no pure and untroubled pleasure.²³
(*DRN III.35–40*)

The purpose of *De Rerum Natura III* is thus two-fold. The first goal is to make the nature of the soul and mind clear, and the second goal is to drive out the fear of death. These two goals are clearly linked. According to Lucretius, the soul is made up of fine particles, like a gas, and one of his key arguments that the soul perishes with the body is that liquids and gases disperse when they are not contained in anything. No matter which way you read *De Rerum Natura III*, it is clear that showing the mortality of the soul is an important step in the argument against the fear of death.

There is, in the introduction to *De Rerum Natura III*, no suggestion that any argument will be made that death is neither good nor bad. Rather, what is promised is a *psychological achievement*: extinguishing the fear of death. The strategy for driving out the fear could, of course, be to present arguments for death's indifference, so it would not be surprising to find such arguments. However, it would also not be surprising if such arguments were entirely absent. Thus we should not, faced with texts that are on the surface psychological, immediately try to 'strip back the rhetoric' and 'find the underlying argument'. Something

²³ hasce secundum res animi natura videtur / atque animae claranda meis iam versibus esse / et metus ille foras praeceps Acheruntis agendus, / funditus humanam qui vitam turbat ab imo / omnia suffundens mortis nigrore neque ullam / esse voluptatem liquidam puramque relinquit.

that looks like advice about a psychological exercise to deal with the fear of death may well be a psychological exercise.

But how did Lucretius go about achieving his psychological goals? His strategy was, first and foremost to demonstrate to people that their souls were mortal. One reason, I think, why philosophers have been reluctant to focus on this aspect of Lucretius' strategy is that it can seem philosophically uninteresting. Much of contemporary analytic philosophy proceeds under the assumption that the soul is mortal, so many philosophers, are surprised by the suggestion that the belief in the immortality of the soul causes the fear of death: they are, perhaps, afraid of death, but believe in the mortality of the soul.²⁴ Kenney claims that Lucretius' first century B.C audience was similar:

Tantalus, Tityos, Sisyphus are demolished, not because Memmius and his peers believed in them, but because other men [*sic*] had believed in them, did believe in them – and would believe in them, or in fresh variations of them, again. The charge that Lucretius was battering at an open door could with equal justice be levelled against each and every writer who in any age has attacked folly and superstition.

Kenney argues that Lucretius targets Memmius and his peers because they are at risk of falling into the same mistakes that others had. But when we read *DRN III*, we see that Lucretius targeted Memmius and his peers much more directly than that. Some, like Plato,

²⁴James Warren in fact states the problem that Epicurus is dealing with is the problem of what to make of death, given that we are mortal. (*Facing Death: 1*) I am arguing here that Epicurus thinks that, if we are mortal, there simply is not a difficult problem about what to make of death.

although they didn't believe in Tantalus and so on, thought it was likely that there was some kind of afterlife. But Lucretius thought that many of his peers paid lip-service to the idea that the soul perished with the body. He emphasised, however, that there was an important difference between paying lip-service and harbouring a deep conviction:

For often people say that illness and a disgraceful life are more to be feared than Tartarus, death's realm, and that they know that the nature of the soul is blood, or indeed wind. If some desire or another carries someone in this way by chance, and our reasoning does not drive them forwards, then they can be overcome, since they have formed their belief for the sake of praise and not because the things themselves demonstrate it. Moreover exiles live far from their homeland, having been driven out of sight from people, defiled by a wicked crime, and affected by every trouble, and also when they are miserable they still elegantly offer sacrifices to their dead kin and sacrifice black cattle and send with their hands to the gods below many things in difficult times, and turn their minds ardently to religion.^{25, 26} (*DRN III.41–54*)

²⁵ In his *Weg zum Glück*, Nickel cites Democritus B297 in connection with this passage. Democritus B297 attributes fears that come from myths to lack of knowledge of our mortality. This connection is helpful to notice because, if Lucretius inherited the idea from Democritus, he probably did so via Epicurus. In this case, we have excellent reason to think the concerns he states here are Epicurus'.

²⁶ nam quod saepe homines morbos magis esse timendos / infamemque ferunt vitam quam Tartara leti / et se scire animi naturam sanguinis esse, / aut etiam venti, si fert ita forte voluntas, / nec prosum quicquam nostrae rationis egere, / hinc licet advertas animum magis omnia laudis / iactari causa quam quod res ipsa probetur. / extorres idem patria longeque fugati / conspectu ex hominum, foedati crimine turpi, / omnibus aerumnis adfecti denique vivunt, / et quo cumque tamen miseri venere parentant / et nigras mactant pecudes et manibus divis / inferias mittunt multoque in rebus acerbis / acrius advertunt animos ad religionem.

Other philosophers have offered theories of the soul as being blood or wind, and presumably, according to these theories, the soul is mortal.²⁷ These beliefs are given in explaining why certain people believe illness and a disgraceful life might be more to be feared than death. The people Lucretius describes in this passage, then, are people who would say they already agreed with him, and would accuse him of battering on an open door.

Lucretius, however, points out that although many people say they believe that death is more to be feared than illness and disgrace, in practice their choices indicate that they prefer to keep living in disgrace and misery than to die. Further when they are miserable, they make sacrifices to their dead kin. This suggests that they believe such sacrifices could somehow be meaningful, indicating that they think their kin persist after death.²⁸ In this passage, Lucretius' diagnosis of the cause of the fear of death is that people lack conviction in their stated beliefs in the mortality of the soul. The remedy to this lack of conviction is to demonstrate that the soul is mortal, so that people won't merely be claiming these beliefs because they sound impressive, but because the facts prove them. Demonstrating that death is not bad is unnecessary, because the cause of the fear of death is not that people understand

²⁷ It's not entirely clear who the targets here were. Aristotle reports that Critias believed that the soul was blood (*De Anima* 405b5-8). The view that soul was air was held by Anaximenes. At least some Stoics thought that the soul was breath, but they are somewhat unlikely targets here, since they thought the soul could outlive the body (although not everybody's, and the remaining soul was not immortal). Although see Seneca's *EM* 24.18, which, if Seneca is cribbing an earlier Stoic, may give evidence of a Stoic target. Bailey (*Commentary, books I-III*) and Kenny (*De Rerum Natura III*) claim that these aren't philosophical alternatives, but popular views. Kenny is right, I think, to emphasise the fact that Lucretius says "if some desire or another carries them this way", but I think it is too restrictive, on the basis of this evidence, to think Lucretius doesn't have in mind other philosophers as well. Lucretius' purpose here is, I think, two-fold: first, to convince people who already largely agree with him in word to undertake the exercise of studying the soul more carefully, and, second, to claim that Epicureans are different from people who merely brag that they are unafraid of death because they believe the soul is material and dies with the body.

²⁸ I thank Stephen Menn for pointing out to me the significance of the fact that this was not only worship of *some sort*, but worship of *dead people*.

what death is correctly, but fail to realise that it's not a bad thing; rather, the cause of the fear of death is a failure to fully believe that death is what it is.

One of the strategies for overcoming the fear of death, then, will be to reinforce people's belief in the mortality of the soul with philosophical argument, so that the belief sits on a solid foundation. And, indeed, much of *DRN III* is devoted to presenting a great many arguments showing that the soul perishes with the body. From this text, we can gain some idea of what Epicurus may have meant by advising people to "accustom themselves in thought to the idea that death is nothing to us": namely, that they should study and rehearse arguments that demonstrate that the soul perishes with the body. This neat relationship between Lucretius and Epicurus arises on the ontological reading of the text, and not with the evaluative reading, for even just working through the array of proofs that we cease to exist when we die in *DRN III* could count as accustoming oneself to believing that we do not come into contact with death, but it is hard to see it as accustoming oneself to the belief that death is not bad for us, a claim that, even on the traditional reading, gets comparatively little air-time.

There is a second kind of mental discipline that could also fall under the description of "accustoming oneself in thought to the idea that death is nothing to us". Lucretius describes people who may be quite well persuaded that we do not exist after death, but who fail to take this non-existence into account when they imagine their own deaths. In one case, he considers people who become afraid of death, because they imagine their corpses decaying. His response to them is as follows:

He does not, then, as I see it, give what he promised, nor does he pull himself from life by the roots and drive himself thence, but he unknowingly makes a certain version of himself in that time, since, when living, he imagines there will be some future self, when the body is such that the vultures and wild beasts tear at it, who will pity himself; and then he has not separated himself from him, nor removed himself enough from the body lying there, and he touches it with sense and standing there comes into contact with himself. Thus he is upset that he is a mortal creature, and does not see in truth that there is no other self that will be there when he is dead, who can, living, lament for himself that he is annihilated, and standing there, grieve himself lying and cut up and burning.²⁹ (*DRN III.876–894*)

What Lucretius here describes is an error in how we imagine ourselves when we are dead.³⁰

We could commit this error even if we had worked through the proofs that we cease to exist when we die, though committing it would show that we hadn't fully thought through the

²⁹ Non, ut opinor, enim dat quod promittit et unde, / nec radicitus e vita se tollit et eicit, / sed facit esse sui quiddam super incius ipse. / vivus enim sibi cum proponit quisque futurum, / corpus uti volucres lacerent in morte feraeque / ipse sui miseret; neque enim se dividit illim / nec removet satis a proiecto coropre et illum / se fingit sensuque suo contaminat adstans. / hinc indignatur se mortalem esse creatum / nec videt in vera nullum fore morte alium se, / qui possit vivus sibi se lugere peremptum / stansque iacentem se lacerari urive dolere.

³⁰ Bailey sees this as evidence that Lucretius has widened his focus in the third section of *DRN III*. (*Commentary, Books I-III*) According to Bailey, while the introduction focussed on fear of punishment in the afterlife, the final section includes two, more instinctive emotions: the fear of something surviving death and experiencing decay, and the desire to continue experiencing pleasure. In fact, such an extension is at most superficial, since Lucretius sees both of these emotions as bound up with belief in persistent existence after death, which I am terming “the afterlife” in this paper.

consequences of these arguments. Lucretius explains that people often imagine what death would be like by imagining one's body decaying. This, however, is a mistake, because in doing so, one brings to the scene one's ability to observe the body decaying. Naturally, it would be upsetting to watch one's body decaying, but being dead doesn't involve doing that, since being dead doesn't involve doing *anything*. Thus, imagining one's body decaying is failing to take the mortality of the soul into account in thinking about one's body after death, and that can certainly lead to the fear of death.

Another, equally clear instance of this kind of argument occurs shortly later. Here, Lucretius is responding to people who worry about never seeing their house and wife and children again after they are dead. Lucretius criticizes them in the following way:

They do not add in these matters, "Nor will now one of
your desires for things remain." Which if they saw well
with their mind, and followed their word, they would
separate themselves from a great suffocation and fear of
the mind³¹ (*DRN III.900–904*)

Again, Lucretius criticizes the *way in which* certain people are thinking about death. When they imagine that after their death they won't be able to see their wife or children or house, they don't realise that they also won't have any desire to see them. No doubt Lucretius thought that continuing to exist with such frustrated desires would be a sorry state to be in, and could understand why people would be afraid of death if that's what it involved. But his

³¹ Illud in his rebus non addunt 'nec tibi earum / iam desiderium rerum super insidet una.' / quod bene si videant animo dictisque sequantur / dissoluant animi magno se angore metuque.

point here is that, in imagining death to be such, one fails to properly take into account the fact that we die with our bodies. Again, it seems that Lucretius thought it possible to be more or less persuaded that the soul dies with the body, but not to have properly taken this into account when one thinks of death.

If the ontological reading is correct, the symmetry argument falls neatly into this second category of accustoming oneself in thought: it can help people to avoid making the same mistakes as those who imagine their rotting corpse, and those who imagine being absent from their families. The symmetry argument offers a model for how to think about death correctly: namely, one must think about it as being similar to the time before birth. This is good practice for imagining death as a situation when one does not exist at all, because people typically do that correctly for the time before they were born. Since the most pressing consideration in favour of the traditional readings was the philosophical context of the texts, these considerations tell heavily in favour of the alternative readings.

Lucretius' approach in *DRN III* then seems unconcerned with proving that death's value is neutral. Rather, the idea is that belief in the afterlife, or a tendency to think as though there was some kind of afterlife, *causes* fear of death. These beliefs and tendencies are difficult to get rid of, and *DRN III* provides the required exercises to put into practice Epicurus' advice of "accustom yourself to thinking that death does not relate to us."

Section Four: Other Ancient Uses of Symmetry

Lucretius was not the only philosopher in antiquity to offer consolation about death by appealing to the time before birth, and, in reading Lucretius, we should keep in mind how other versions of the appeal work.³² Given the ambiguities involved in the Epicurean arguments about death, clearer statements of the appeal in other ancient sources could well lead us to come down in favour of one or the other possible reading. Although I think some examples outside of Lucretius speak in favour of the traditional reading, I want to argue in this section that in at least two cases, the approach I am suggesting for Lucretius offers the most convincing reading.

The first case occurs in the pseudo-Platonic dialogue *Axiochus*. In this dialogue, Socrates argues that death is not to be feared. He has just reprimanded his interlocutor, Axiochus, for acting with fear in the face of death, even when arguments should have persuaded him that death was no bad thing. Axiochus explains what's going on with him:

Ax. These things are true, Socrates, and you seem to speak rightly. But I do not know how, when I have come up alongside this terrible thing, strong and sufficient arguments immediately evaporate for me, and are held in no honour, for some fear holds out against them, pricking the intellect in various ways, that I will be deprived of light and of good things, and I will lie rotting somewhere unseen and unheard of, changing into worms and wild creatures.³³ (*Axiochus* 365c)

³² For a good discussion, see Warren, *Facing Death*: 68-75

³³ {ΑΞ.} Ἀληθῆ ταῦτα, ὃ Σώκρατες, καὶ ὀρθῶς μοι φαίνεται λέγων· ἀλλ' οὐκ οἶδα ὅπως παρ' αὐτό μοι τὸ δεινὸν γενομένων οἱ μὲν καρτεροὶ καὶ περιττοὶ λόγοι ὑπεκπνέουσιν λεληθότως καὶ ἀτιμάζονται, ἀντίσχει δὲ δέος τι, ποικίλως περιαμύττον τὸν νοῦν, εἰ στερήσομαι τοῦδε τοῦ φωτός καὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν, αἰδῆς δὲ καὶ ἄπυστος ὅποῖποτε κείσομαι σιγώμενος, εἰς εὐλὰς καὶ κνώδαλα μεταβάλλων.

Axiochus is exactly the sort of person that Lucretius is concerned with in the final section of *DRN III*. His complaints are precisely the same: he is afraid of being deprived of good things, and of the decay of his corpse, and its consumption by wild animals. Axiochus sounds like he is making the mistake that Lucretius warns against, of imagining his death in such a way that presupposes his continued existence, and this is very close to the diagnosis that Socrates gives of the source of his fear:

Soc. But you combine perception with lack of perception, Axiochus, through your inattention, and you both do and say things contrary to yourself, because you do not consider that at the same time you bewail the lack of perception, at the same time you grieve about decay and the privation of pleasures, as though having died into a new life, but not receiving the same complete lack of perception as that before birth. Indeed just as in the time of Dracon or Cleisthenes there was nothing bad concerning you – for you were not there of old, for it to concern – so will it be after the end; for you will not be there, for it to concern.³⁴ (*Axiochus* 365d)

³⁴ {ΣΩ.} Συνάπτεις γάρ, ὃ Ἄξιόχε, παρὰ τὴν ἀνεπιστάσιαν ἀνεπιλογίστως τῇ ἀναισθησίᾳ αἰσθῆσιν, καὶ σεαυτῷ ὑπεναντία καὶ ποιεῖς καὶ λέγεις, οὐκ ἐπιλογιζόμενος ὅτι ἅμα μὲν ὀδύρῃ τὴν ἀναισθησίαν, ἅμα δὲ ἀλγεῖς ἐπὶ σήψεσι καὶ στερήσῃ τῶν ἡδέων, ὥσπερ εἰς ἕτερον ζῆν ἀποθανούμενος, ἀλλ' οὐκ εἰς παντελῇ μεταβαλὼν ἀναισθησίαν καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν τῇ πρὸ τῆς γενέσεως. ὥς οὖν ἐπὶ τῆς Δράκοντος ἢ Κλεισθέους πολιτείας οὐδὲν περὶ σέ κακὸν ἦν—ἀρχὴν γὰρ οὐκ ἦς, περὶ ὃν ἂν ἦν—οὕτως οὐδὲ μετὰ τὴν τελευτὴν γενήσεται· σὺ γὰρ οὐκ ἔση περὶ ὃν ἔσται.

Socrates accuses Axiochus of being inattentive in the way he's thinking about things, and tries to set him straight. His carelessness in thinking about death has led him to worry about two inconsistent things: first, lack of perception, and second, bodily decay and the privation of goods. He accuses Axiochus of combining perception with lack of perception, because Axiochus is imagining somehow being affected by the fact that he's lost good things, and by the fact that his body is decaying. Axiochus should imagine the same total lack of sense perception after death as that which he received before birth: in other words, he should try to use the way he thinks about the time before he was born as a model for the time after he was dead, and this will give him a clearer, and less frightening, picture.

The final section of the text is tricky. It looks like an argument, but it is difficult to see how it works as an argument. One would have to take it as an analogy, trading on the similarity that both before birth and after death, we do not exist, and so bad things cannot relate to us. But if we have already accepted that we do not exist, and bad things cannot relate to us if we do not exist, then it's unclear what work is left for the analogy *to do*: the conclusion is established adequately without the appeal to the time before birth.

If instead we take it, as the text allows, as simply stating the similarity, it works better. We should imagine bad things in death failing to relate to us in exactly the same way as before our birth, because in both cases, the cause of their failing to relate to us is the same: our non-existence. This justifies our using the time before our birth as a model to think about the time after our death, and if we think about it in that way, we will not be bothered by the thought of our corpse rotting and being consumed by worms and wild animals. By offering

such a model, Socrates is helping Axiochus to avoid thinking about death in a careless way, and to properly imagine what it means to lack sense perception.

The second case is from Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*. Cicero argues as follows:

[But you say that] it is something odious, to be without sense. It is odious, if it is 'to be in want of'. Since indeed it is obvious that there can be nothing in someone who does not exist, what could be odious in him, who is neither in want of something nor senses? Although I have said this same thing often, this is because every shrinking of the soul from the fear of death is in this. For whoever sees well enough, that which is clearer than light, that when body and soul have been completely consumed the whole living being has been destroyed, and total annihilation has taken place, this animal, which was, is made nothing, he sees clearly that there is no difference between Agamemnon and a centaur, which never existed, and that neither is M. Camillus more concerned with this civil war than I with the capture of Rome in his lifetime.³⁵ (*Tusculans* 1.90)

As in the example from the *Axiochus*, we first get a self-sufficient argument that there's nothing odious in death: there can't be anything bad in someone who does not lack, nor sense.

³⁵ At id ipsum odiosum est, sine sensu esse. Odiosum, si id esset carere. Cum vero perspicuum sit nihil posse in eo esse, qui ipse non sit, quid potest esse in eo odiosum, qui nec careat nec sentiat? Quamquam hoc quidem nimis saepe, sed eo, quod in hoc inest omnis animi contractio ex metu mortis. Qui enim satis viderit, id quod est luce clarius, animo et corpore consumpto totoque animante deleta et facto interitu universo illud animal, quod fuerit, factum esse nihil, is plane perspiciet inter Hippocentaurum, qui numquam fuerit, et regem Agamemnonem nihil interesse, nec pluris nunc facere M. Camillum hoc civile bellum, quam ego vivo illo fecerim Romam captam.

Cicero's argument trades on a distinction between "to in want of" [*carere*] and "to be without" [*sine esse*]. *Carere* can imply more than just lacking or being without, but having in addition a *feeling* that the thing is missing. This is most likely the sense of the contrast: the dead are not "in want of" sense perception, in the sense that they are somehow pained by the lack of it; rather, they simply do not have such sense perception.³⁶

Just as Socrates accuses Axiochus of inattention, Cicero here states that the point bears repeating, since, although it is clearer than light, people do not see it well enough. He then offers two illustrations, presumably to help us see the point better: the first is an analogy between Agamemnon and a centaur. Neither exist, and we would not seriously entertain the thought that a centaur had ever been harmed; this should help us see the problem with considering Agamemnon as being harmed. The final comparison is reminiscent of Lucretius' mention of the Carthaginians in *DRN III*: Cicero's no more affected by Rome's capture in Camillus' time, than Camillus is by the civil war in Cicero's, because neither exists at the same time as the unrest.³⁷

Neither the centaur example, nor the symmetry example, seem to be operating in this text as arguments, but they rather seem to be offered as ways to help people see a point that they

³⁶ *Carere* could also simply mean "to lack" as opposed to "not to have", so that the idea of privation is in play. This distinction does not seem to me strong enough to explain why we should not care about death. Perhaps the idea here could be that *not to have* can apply to things that do not exist; but lacking implies existence.

³⁷ A few lines later, at *Tusculans 1.91* we get a fairly clear example in which the symmetry is used quite differently, to argue that in the time after death there is no harm to us.

appreciate, but need help taking on board, a point that bears repeating multiple times.³⁸ And this is similar to how I'm proposing reading the similar appeal in Lucretius.

Other authors, aside from Lucretius, then use the similarity between the time before birth and the time after death to help people think about the time after death more clearly, or more carefully, rather than using it as an argument from analogy. Although this doesn't directly support my reading, it certainly forestalls the thought that I am offering a reading of Lucretius according to which his use of the appeal diverges radically from how the appeal was used by other ancient authors; if my reading of the relevant texts is correct, Lucretius' non-argumentative use of the symmetry between the time before birth and the time after death was by no means unusual among ancient authors.

Section Five: The Epicurean Meta-Argument

Do we get out of the Epicureans any good reason to think we *shouldn't* fear death, or do we merely get from them a course in therapy? In this section, I argue that, if we accept all their empirical claims, we do indeed get good reason to think that we shouldn't fear death. The reason is that the cause of this fear is ignorance. The effectiveness of a course of therapy that got rid of the fear of death through other means may not offer any reason to think it had done any good, but because the Epicurean therapy works by dispelling ignorance, it gives us good reason to doubt that death is indeed something to be feared.

³⁸ I don't mean to say that *because* they are ways of taking things on board, they are not arguments. Rehearsing arguments is one way to get people to take something on board, and one that the Epicureans are particularly keen on. But there are ways of getting people to take things on board that are not arguments, such as simply reminding them of the proposition (consider repeating the *tetrapharmakos*). These examples fall somewhere on the continuum between rehearsing arguments and simply repeating propositions in terms of rationality.

Before I develop this response, I'd like to consider why an alternative account fails. According to this line, there is a division within Epicurean ethics into two different kinds of arguments. On the one hand, there are diagnostic arguments.³⁹ The purpose of these arguments is to work out which desires and aversions stand in need of a cure. On the other hand, there are therapeutic arguments. The purpose of these arguments is to cure people of improper desires and aversions. These arguments are assessed not by their rationality, but by their efficacy. The Epicurean arguments typically taken to be about the fear of death would, on this reading, be therapeutic arguments, whose application was justified not by themselves, but by some other argument.

According to this reading of Epicurean methodology, the only diagnostic argument the Epicureans made use of was the cradle argument. The cradle argument is, on this reading, sufficient to show that death is not bad, because infants cannot yet conceive of their own death, much less can they fear it. Since the fear of death is not present in the cradle, this argument goes, it is an unnatural fear, and thus it is improper, and ought to be eliminated through the use of therapeutic arguments.

The problem with this line of response is that it gives the cradle argument too much importance. To see why, it is helpful to carry out a thought experiment. Suppose it turned out that infants *did* fear death in the cradle. On the reading we are considering, the Epicureans would have to accept that the fear of death was natural and rational, and ought not to be eliminated. But then, what are they to make of people who have eliminated their fear of death

³⁹ This account is inspired by a reading of Martha Nussbaum's "Therapeutic Arguments: Epicurus and Aristotle".

through eliminating their belief in the afterlife, using the arguments within Epicurean science. Are we to suppose that the Epicureans will see these people as *lacking* a natural fear, one that they must now somehow re-establish? But they only lost their fear because they came to understand the nature of death better, and the Epicureans appear to be left in the embarrassing position of needing to champion ignorance over knowledge.

A proponent of this line might try to resist this line of thought by arguing that Epicurean science was, after all, simply designed to be therapy. If the Epicureans thought a different therapy was required, they would have designed a different science; perhaps they would have invented clever arguments for the *immortality* of the soul, and claimed that anybody who did not buy these arguments was ignorant. They would avoid embarrassment through sophistry. But this position still introduces an uncomfortable dissonance between the Epicureans' self-presentation, and their actual method. The Epicureans certainly saw science as serving the purpose of making people happy: it was sufficient, for example, to list several different, naturalistic explanations of a phenomenon to reassure oneself that it wasn't caused by a divinity, and the Epicureans saw it as unnecessary to take the inquiry further than this. Nonetheless, Epicurean science proceeds with a respectable methodology, extrapolating cautiously from the things we can observe to the things we cannot. It is one thing to say that you carry out such investigations only into matters relevant to human happiness; it is quite another to say that you are willing to actively deceive yourself. There is no evidence that the Epicureans were willing to do the latter.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ For a good discussion of these issues, see R.J. Hankinson, "Lucretius, Epicurus, and the Logic of Multiple Explanations".

As I foreshadowed, Epicureans could have responded to the objection we are considering in a different way. Provided they had the science right, they could claim that they were merely correcting errors in reasoning. If the fear of death always depended on failing to think about death correctly, then that would show that the fear of death was an improper fear to have. The argument would not, of course, be deductively valid: it does not show that a fully informed fear of death is impossible. But, provided Epicureans believed that whenever they managed to eliminate belief in the afterlife, they also eliminated the fear of death, they could argue that what they said was true in all cases so far observed, and that the most reasonable thing to do was to assume that they cases they hadn't yet observed would be the same. My claim is not that Epicureans had this argument in mind when they wrote about death, or that any Epicurean ever made it, but simply that the argument was available to them to make. And because it was available to them, the charge that they *had to* demonstrate that death was not bad in order to justify their treatment of it carries little weight.

One worry that you might have about this response is as follows: just because people usually fear death for bad reasons, doesn't mean it's not to be feared. You might think that whether death is to be feared depends on what death is like, whether it's an awful thing or not, and that this is quite independent from what reasons people might have for fearing it. The argument that I have offered the Epicureans here seems to some people to be an argument of *entirely the wrong sort*. And if it's an argument of *entirely the wrong sort*, then offering it to the Epicureans isn't offering them very much.

It's important to clarify that the Epicureans thought that people *only ever* feared death for bad reasons, and here it's more difficult to argue that there are some good reasons to fear death,

because they would have to be reasons that had not yet occurred to anyone. This is clearly a very bold psychological claim, and we may think, for example, that some people who fear death because they fear that their body will decay do so because they are quite reasonably attached to their body, in the same way they may be attached to a house, country, or park: it's certainly a widely accepted practice to take steps to protect one's house, country, or favourite park after one's death simply because one happens to like them. Epicurus has to make the claim that people who understand death's nature properly in fact *never* worry about what will happen to their body after death.

It is certainly fair to say that the necessity of making such a bold empirical claim is a weakness of Epicurus' argument. Epicurus thought he'd tested the claim, but his testing was far from rigorous, and it has certainly never been rigorously tested. Nevertheless, it is this claim that is essential to his argument.

What would Epicurus do if the claim turned out to be wrong, and some people feared death, even when they fully understood its nature, and had taken it into consideration? I think that such people would present a real, though limited, problem for Epicurus. The way I'm reading Epicurus, he would have no arguments to confront the fear of such people, and I think he may even have had to concede that in their case, it seems that the fear is one that arises naturally from a proper understanding of the situation. Nevertheless, provided their fear did not arise from a superior understanding of the nature of death, Epicurus could argue that, in the cases of the people he could cure, the fear of death was irrational.

This might seem like a particularly serious problem, because we might worry that we could condition someone into fearing death, even if they'd internalised Epicurus' arguments, and that the possibility of such conditioning should not make a difference to how rational a fear is. But in this case, the fear is not a natural one, and Epicurus could argue that it was only reasonable to induce helpful emotions in people through conditioning. Since the fear of death makes people miserable, it's not the sort of emotion you should condition people to have, and so people who have been so conditioned have a good reason to consider reversing the conditioning.

Some people will nonetheless worry that the argument, as presented, somehow *shortcuts proper philosophical argument*. I am not sure what sort of proper philosophical argument is expected.

One possibility is that people worry that arguing like I've suggested the Epicureans did foreclose any further discussion on the nature of death, and thus rules out the possibility that we will discover something fearful about death in the future. But the Epicurean argument depends crucially on the claim that the Epicurean account of the nature of death is the best. Objecting to the Epicurean account of the nature of death is thus a legitimate way of objecting to the meta-argument, and the discussion of the rationality of fearing death still ultimately depends on whether death is the sort of thing that people would find frightening or not.

Another possibility is that the worry is one about standards of rigour. It might seem like the Epicureans are trying to take an argumentative shortcut. If they want to present a serious

account of the fearfulness of death, the worry might go, they cannot simply present a theory of what death is like, but they must also carefully consider the implications of this account for value theory. What the Epicureans do instead is to replace such careful consideration with the observation that people tend to stop fearing death when they learn about the account of death. But this would be possible, for example, if the account of death was one according to which death looked superficially fine, but for some deep and subtle reason was actually terrifying. The reason might be deep enough or subtle enough that nobody would find it without very careful consideration, and the possibility of such deep and subtle reasons is *precisely why* we require that the careful consideration of the normative consequences of a theory of death be carried out.

In considering this worry, it's useful to consider two different ways in which a standard of rigour might apply. In the first way, a positive proof, demonstration, or discussion may be required for a standard of rigour to be met. In the second way, the proponent of a position must be able to respond adequately to objections raised by opponents. It is clear enough to me that an Epicurean must be able to respond to arguments that oblivion is something we ought to actually be afraid of, and that faced with a powerful argument to that conclusion, the Epicurean wouldn't be able simply to assert that people *don't* seem to be afraid of it. But such arguments would need to be dealt with one by one. It may well be that the Epicurean meta-argument ought to be accompanied by a discussion of the best arguments to the opposite conclusion, and why they are unconvincing; but the charge that this is missing is really only a claim that they left their task unfinished, and doesn't undermine their claim to have completed an important part of it. On the other hand, once we've added the requirement

that Epicureans need to be responsive to objections from within value theory, it becomes very unclear that more is required of them in terms of positive proof or demonstration.

Epicureans, then, seem capable of meeting the challenge that, by neglecting to directly discuss the question of death's value, they gave up the philosopher's mantle and took up that of the self-help guru. Because they claimed that their 'therapy' of the fear of death consists in making its true nature clearer to those who were afraid of it, they could argue that they were only getting rid of a fear that rested on a mistake about the way the world was. In positioning themselves in this way, they leave themselves open to potential objections: opponents can try to challenge their account of death, and they can try to show that death *ought* to be feared, even if their account is correct. But this is precisely the position we would expect any philosophers arguing against the fear of death to occupy.

Conclusion

With these considerations, we close our discussion of the Epicureans. We have seen about the Epicureans that they base their arguments about the goodness of things in observations about desires: about whether people desire and fear things when they are fully informed, and about whether they can be satisfied with and without the relevant desires and fears. This methodology is strikingly different from that of the other philosophers we have considered, and makes sense against a scepticism that the good has particular properties that may allow us to find it, or that we have particular capacities that may allow us to recognize it. Seneca, Aristotle, and the *Philebus*' Socrates would still want to know what it was about death and

pleasure that indicated their value, or lack thereof; the Epicureans would, I think, would have wondered why they should bother.

~*Sextus Empiricus*~

Should you be Left Hanging?

So far, we have seen four different approaches to argument about the goodness of things, each of which makes sense against the background of a particular answer to the Central Question. We might well think, given the nature of this disagreement, that the only truly reasonable response for someone looking at the ancient debate would be to suspend belief about the goodness of things. Unless one can be satisfied that one has the best way of thinking about the argumentative context and the goals of argumentation, it seems unreasonable to stick dogmatically to one's answer and the accompanying methodology.

In this final chapter, I will argue that this is how the ancient Pyrrhonian Skeptics saw things, and show that seeing things this way *itself* depends on a particular understanding of the argumentative context and the goals of argumentation, an answer which is not obviously better placed than any of the others, but which is no worse placed. I will be arguing, somewhat controversially, that the Pyrrhonists claim that what can be gained from philosophical reflection on the goodness of things is freedom from a certain kind of trouble, the kind of trouble caused by holding beliefs in the goodness of things. This is more, they

think, than you will get from other schools; but they didn't think that freedom from this kind of trouble was the goal of life, or happiness, nor did they think that they would offer any philosophical guidance about the right things to desire. At least, not anything more than: don't try to align your desires to some theory about the goodness of things.

As we will see, the Pyrrhonists' understanding of the argumentative context was a factor motivating their response to the Problem of the Criterion, which was in turn a central plank of their case for suspension of belief. The Problem of the Criterion is, effectively, that there is no agreed on standard for judging whether an argument is good enough or not; this problem allows the Pyrrhonists to suspend belief simply by listing arguments to contradictory conclusions. Because there is no way to say which argument is better, they recommend suspending belief. Often, these arguments are taken from different philosophical schools: for example, a Stoic argument will be placed against an Epicurean argument. As we have seen, the ancient Skeptics were right in at least one regard: the Stoic argument is likely to be good by Stoic standards, and the Epicurean by Epicurean standards, and there's no neutral perspective from which to judge which is a better argument. On the other hand, each standard makes sense in the light of its proponent's understanding of the argumentative context, that is, its proponent's understanding of the intellectual problem they were trying to solve with the argument. Since there is good scope for reasonable disagreement about how to understand the argumentative context, each member of the debate can reasonably maintain their standard. On the other hand, if your most important concern is not forming beliefs too lightly, because you are worried about some harm that ensues from beliefs, then it will make the most sense for you to suspend belief. This was the position the ancient Skeptics were in, thinking that beliefs about the goodness and badness of things made those who held them suffer.

In the final section, I will consider whether, in positing peace of mind and moderate feeling as the *telos* of Skeptical practice, the Skeptics were committed to thinking that a good argument was simply one that brought about peace of mind. I argue that they did not: they did not think they were able to tell which arguments were good, and which were bad. Instead, in giving peace of mind and moderate feeling the role of the *telos*, they are saying what counts as a successful application of the ability. Nevertheless, since the *telos* was chosen *in lieu* of knowledge, they would also have considered an application of the Skeptical ability that resulted in knowledge as a success. It is in this limited sense that the Skeptics still count as searching for the truth.

Section One: The Problem with the Problem of the Criterion

Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Scepticism* starts with a long introduction to the philosophical school of Scepticism, its aims, its standard methods, and a comparison of ancient Scepticism to ancient medicine. Eventually, his introduction draws to a close, and he promises to turn to the arduous task of showing that the investigations of dogmatic philosophy are, without exception, inconclusive. More introduction to Scepticism occurs, as he provides arguments that Sceptics can indeed think and argue about dogmatic philosophy. This comes to an end; we can finally start taking the dogmatists' arguments to pieces. His first target is the standard (*kritērion*) of truth.

There is no doubt that he chose to start with the standard of truth advisedly. The possession of a standard of truth would be a handy solution to many Sceptical arguments, and indeed, he

will refer back to his arguments about the standard of truth in his discussion of the good.¹ Understanding his strategy against the ethicists is much facilitated by considering his case against belief in a standard. He gives a complete case in PH II.18-20, though he continues at great length to extend his case “so that we may be able to bring some variety into our refutation of [the Dogmatists]”. I will, in this section, discuss only the short version of the case, because it is enough to motivate the epistemic concerns that power Sextus’ discussion of the good.

The first argument he proposes is as follows:

For they will say that this disagreement is either decidable or undecidable.

And if undecidable, they will immediately concede the necessity of suspending. If decidable, let them say by what it is to be decided, if we do not have an agreed upon criterion, and if we do not know in general if one exists, but are investigating this matter.² (PH II.19.1–20.1)

One way out of Sextus’ argument might be to point out that some standards are self-defeating. In the *Theaetetus*, Plato tries to show that Protagoras’ view that whatever people believe is true to them is self-defeating, by arguing that, if Protagoras’ view is true, then it’s false for those who do not believe it.³ Socrates’ strategy is controversial, but Sextus, to complete his argument, would need to explain why we would need a shared standard, and couldn’t simply

¹ PH III.182

² ταύτην οὖν τὴν διαφωνίαν ἥτοι ἐπικριτὴν εἶναι φήσουσιν ἢ ἀνεπίκριτον· καὶ εἰ μὲν ἀνεπίκριτον, αὐτόθεν [εἶναι] δώσουσι τὸ δεῖν ἐπέχειν, εἰ δὲ ἐπικριτὴν, τίτι κριθήσεται λεγέτωσαν, μήτε κριτήριον ὁμολογούμενον ἡμῶν ἐχόντων, μήθ’ ὅλως εἰ ἔστιν εἰδόντων ἀλλὰ ζητούντων.

³ *Theaetetus* 171a–c

try to show that we came to the same conclusion about the standard, no matter which standard we adopted. He doesn't do this.

But Sextus does emphasise that it's up for debate whether there is a standard of truth at all. While the strategy of adopting the standards of each disputing side might be a promising way to deal with those who hold that there is a standard, it is hard to see how to use the thought that there is no standard in order to determine what the standard of truth may be. Another way out is to block the inference from "the dispute is undecidable" to "we should suspend belief". The move is certainly a controversial one, but on the surface it's a good move.⁴ We will return to this point later.

Sextus' next argument occurs in the following passage:

And we show this in another way, for the disagreement that arises about the standard to be decided, it is necessary that we have an agreed on standard, through which we can decide it. And before we have an agreed on standard, it is necessary that the disagreement about the standard be decided. Thus they fall into the reciprocal mode of argument and the discovery of the standard becomes inaccessible, and nor should we permit them to adopt a

⁴ The classic defence of suspension of disbelief in light of peer disagreement under full disclosure is Feldman's "Epistemological Puzzles about Disagreement". However, the issue Sextus raises here is a special case of peer disagreement. It is possible, for example, for two physicists to agree entirely on method—which instruments to use; which statistical methods; when to depend on judgement, and so on, and still wind up in a persistent position of disagreement, each believing themselves to have applied the shared method correctly, and the other to have applied it incorrectly. Sextus' claim is, however, that there is no shared method; it is more akin to two psychologists in disagreement about whether qualitative research should be taken seriously or not. In such disagreements, pragmatic ideas about the point of studying psychology may come into play, which might, as we will see below, give special reasons not to suspend.

standard by hypothesis, and when they want to decide on a standard using a standard, we throw them into an infinite regress.⁵ (*PH* II.20.1–10)

The argument trades on the same problem as the first, although its form is different. The issue is that without already having a standard of truth, we cannot resolve the dispute about what, if anything, the standard of truth is. Nonetheless, unpacking the steps of the argument is helpful. The argument is based in the five modes of Scepticism, argumentative techniques that Sextus claims belong to a relatively recent tranche of Sceptics. The reciprocal mode:

When what ought to be confirmatory of the thing being sought needs a proof from the thing being sought; then it is possible to take neither to set up the other, and we suspend judgement about both.⁶ (*PH* I.169.1–5)

That is, it is a point about vicious circularity: if I need what I'm trying to find in order to find it, then I'm not going to be able to find it, and I should suspend judgement about it. The mode, so far as it goes, is sound, and it is a serious and fundamental problem for investigating the standards of truth. But, of course, we all know this game, and many of us, when it comes to the standards of truth, at least, are inclined to shrug the problem off and get on with things: we take whatever we were assuming to be standards of truth to be good standards, and we

⁵ καὶ ἄλλως, ἵνα ἡ γενομένη περὶ τοῦ κριτηρίου διαφωνία ἐπικριθῇ, δεῖ κριτήριον ἡμᾶς ἔχειν ὡμολογημένον, δι' οὗ δύνησόμεθα κρίνειν αὐτήν· καὶ ἵνα κριτήριον ὁμολογούμενον ἔχωμεν, δεῖ πρότερον ἐπικριθῆναι τὴν περὶ τοῦ κριτηρίου διαφωνίαν. οὕτω δὲ εἰς τὸν διάλληλον ἐμπίπτοντος τρόπον τοῦ λόγου, ἄπορος ἢ εὕρεσις τοῦ κριτηρίου γίνεται, μήτε ἐξ ὑποθέσεως ἡμῶν ἐόντων αὐτοὺς κριτήριον λαμβάνειν, ἐάν τε κριτηρίῳ τὸ κριτήριον κρίνειν ἐθέλωσιν, εἰς ἀπειρίαν αὐτοὺς ἐκβαλλόντων. ἀλλὰ καί, ἐπεὶ ἡ μὲν ἀπόδειξις δεῖται κριτηρίου ἀποδεδειγμένου, τὸ δὲ κριτήριον ἀποδείξεως κεκριμένης, εἰς τὸν διάλληλον ἐκβάλλονται τρόπον.

⁶ ὅταν τὸ ὀφείλον τοῦ ζητουμένου πράγματος εἶναι βεβαιωτικὸν χρειᾶν ἔχῃ τῆς ἐκ τοῦ ζητουμένου πίστεως· ἔνθα μηδέτερον δυνάμενοι λαβεῖν πρὸς κατασκευὴν θατέρου, περὶ ἀμφοτέρων ἐπέχομεν.

proceed with them. In other words, we adopt standards by hypothesis. Sextus mentions in the argument that he won't let us do that, and his strategy for stopping us can be found again in his discussion of the five modes:

If, in trying to escape this, our interlocutor thinks it fit to take something in accordance with consent and without demonstration for the demonstration of the subsequent things. The hypothetical mode enters, and they are caught. For if they are convincing when they set something down, we will always set down the opposite without being less convincing.⁷ (PH I.173.1-6)

Sextus lists two more techniques for dealing with hypothesising, but this is by far the best. Remember that the context in question is a disputed issue. The advice is not to just hypothesise any old position, but to hypothesise one of the live positions in the debate. By hypothesising it we demonstrate the uselessness of hypothesising as a means of resolving a dispute.

Sextus' final argument appeals to the relationship between proofs and standards, and again appeals to the reciprocal mode:

But again, since a demonstration needs a demonstrated standard, and a standard needs a proof which has been judged, they are thrown into the reciprocal mode. (PH II.20.10-12)

⁷ εἰ δὲ ταῦτα φεύγων ὁ προσδιαλεγόμενος ἡμῖν κατὰ συγχώρησιν καὶ ἀναποδείκτως ἀξιώσει λαμβάνειν τι πρὸς ἀπόδειξιν τῶν ἐξῆς, ὁ ὑποθετικὸς εἰσαχθήσεται τρόπος, ἄπορος ὑπάρχων. εἰ μὲν γὰρ ὁ ὑποτιθέμενος πιστός ἐστιν, ἡμεῖς αἰεὶ τὸ ἀντικείμενον ὑποτιθέμενοι οὐκ ἐσόμεθα ἀπιστότεροι.

The argument is: the appropriate standard needs to be proven to be the right one, since people disagree about which the right standard is. But since people disagree about which proofs are adequate as well, we need a standard that will let us determine which proofs we should accept. Again, the temptation is to escape simply by choosing the standard that seems the most promising to us by hypothesis, but Sextus will simply select our opponent's position by hypothesis, and the futility of our gesture will quickly become clear. We may well grow frustrated.

Sextus' very short discussion of standards already raises a serious problem for any investigation into ethical problems. Without an agreed upon standard for investigation, we cannot proceed; but there is neither an agreed upon standard for investigation, nor an agreed upon method for resolving the disagreement about standards for investigation, and so we find ourselves at an impasse. All we can do, it seems, is make a choice and proceed with our investigation, but the fact that those who disagree with us can do the same puts the rationality of our decision in question. Under the appropriate circumstances, it can seem that the right thing to do is to suspend judgement.

Of course, in ethics we do not usually require *demonstrations*, but arguments that meet some weaker standard. It may be that for demonstrations, we require an agreed upon standard, but for the kind of arguments we find in ethics, a standard that is only agreed on by, for example, relatively good people will be enough for our purposes. What we have seen in the previous chapters, however, was that at least in the context that Sextus was writing, people studying the good disagreed deeply about which arguments were acceptable in ethics; if intelligent

people seriously and well-meaningly disagree on how to evaluate arguments in ethics, then we get the same problem as with demonstrative arguments.

Sextus' diagnosis of the difficulty of resolving disagreement about the standard of truth is compelling. If the argument goes wrong, it does so at the last step: that given an undecidable dispute about standards of truth, the appropriate course of action is to suspend judgement. When we turn to the next section, it will become clear that endorsing this move itself depends on taking a kind of stance on the standard of truth, a stance that has no better claim to reasonableness than its alternatives.

Section Two: the Problem of the Criterion in Practice

My aim in this section is to discuss the strategies of argument that Sextus uses, primarily in *PH*, in investigating the goodness of things, and to show how the problem of the criterion underwrites his use of these strategies. It is the lack of an agreed on criterion that allows him to use argument strategies from all philosophical schools, either drawing opposite conclusions by applying the same strategies, or simply opposing solutions to each other, without critically engaging on the question of which application is correct.

For the other philosophers I have discussed so far in this thesis, I have compiled lists of strategies that they have used. In discussing Sextus, however, the question isn't about the argument strategies he employs: he picks up argument strategies from other philosophers. Instead, it's about how he uses the strategies of other philosophers. There are broadly three ways.

Using strategies from the same philosopher to reach different conclusions: Sextus sometimes takes a strategy that a philosopher uses to reach one conclusion, and draws, often using the very same strategy, a different conclusion. This is accompanied by no attempt to determine which application of the strategy is a better or truer application.⁸

Simply listing different positions on the same issue: sometimes, Sextus makes no use of argument at all, but simply lists a range of different positions that different philosophers have taken on an issue.

Using strategies from different philosophical schools to reach opposing conclusions: Sextus sometimes lists strategies used by different philosophical schools to reach opposing conclusions. In this case, he makes no attempt to determine who has the best argument, or to motivate the arguments as being equally compelling; he simply lays out the different arguments.

The first case doesn't obviously rely on the problem that there is no shared criterion, and if Sextus always argued against a philosopher's position by turning their own arguments against them, then he would have no need of the problem of the criterion. The second case is, I think, used primarily to undermine claims that some moral truth is obvious, or universally agreed on. At least, the two most striking cases of it fit this description: Sextus uses it to show that not everyone agrees that pleasure is a good thing, and he provides an extensive list of

⁸ A good example of this is in *PH 183* where Sextus, quite rightly, responds to the argument that courage is good by nature because lions possess it says that roosters show that roosters possess cowardice.

philosophers maintaining very surprising moral positions.⁹ It is the third case where the problem of the criterion becomes necessary.

To see this, let us look at an example of Sextus' use of the third technique:

The Epicureans thought they showed that pleasure was choiceworthy by nature in this way: they say the animal at its birth, being uncorrupted, goes after pleasure and steers away from pain. And against this it is possible to say: that that which is productive of bad is not good by nature. But pleasure is productive of bad; because pain, which is according to them bad by nature, accompanies every pleasure. [...] Moreover, nor is that which is productive of good bad by nature, as pains lead to pleasures. For it is by suffering that we come into possession of knowledge and wealth and a beloved woman and that anyone becomes powerful, and pains preserve health. Thus pain is not bad by nature. For also if pleasure is good by nature, and work bad, then everyone would be affected by them similarly, as we said. But we see lots of philosophers choosing work and perseverance, and looking down on pleasure.¹⁰ (*PH III.194.1–6.1*)

⁹ On pleasure, see *PH III.181*. On surprising moral views, see *PH III.198–234*.

¹⁰ ὅθεν καὶ οἱ Ἐπικούρειοι δεικνύναι νομίζουσι φύσει αἰρετὴν εἶναι τὴν ἡδονήν· τὰ γὰρ ζῷα φασιν ἅμα τῷ γενέσθαι, ἀδιάστροφα ὄντα, ὁρμᾶν μὲν ἐπὶ τὴν ἡδονήν, ἐκκλίνειν δὲ ἀλγηδόνας. καὶ πρὸς τούτους δὲ ἔστι λέγειν, ὅτι τὸ ποιητικὸν κακοῦ οὐκ ἂν εἴη φύσει ἀγαθόν· ἡ δὲ γε ἡδονὴ κακῶν ἐστὶ ποιητικὴ· πάσῃ γὰρ ἡδονῇ παραπέπηγεν ἀλγηδών, ἥ ἐστὶ κατ' αὐτοὺς φύσει κακόν. [...] ἀραπλησίως δὲ καὶ τὸ ποιητικὸν ἀγαθοῦ οὐκ ἐστὶ φύσει κακόν, ἡδονὰς δὲ ἀποτελοῦσιν ἀλγηδόνες· καὶ γὰρ ἐπιστήμας ἀναλαμβάνομεν πονοῦντες, καὶ πλούτου καὶ ἐρωμένης οὕτως ἐγκρατὴς γίνεται τις, καὶ ὑγίειαν περιποιοῦσιν αἱ ἀλγηδόνες. οὐκ ἄρα ὁ πόνος φύσει κακόν. καὶ γὰρ εἰ φύσει ἀγαθὸν μὲν ἦν ἡ ἡδονή, φαῦλον δὲ ὁ πόνος, πάντες ἂν ὁμοίως διέκειντο περὶ αὐτῶν, ὡς ἐλέγομεν· ὁρῶμεν δὲ πολλοὺς τῶν φιλοσόφων τὸν μὲν πόνον καὶ τὴν καρτερίαν αἰρουμένους, τῆς ἡδονῆς δὲ καταφρονοῦντας.

Here, we see Sextus making use of disagreement between ancient schools about argument strategies to secure suspension of belief, as follows:

1. The Stoics thought if something ever caused something bad it wasn't good, the other schools disagreed;
2. The Epicureans thought the preferences of infants were reliable indicators of what was good, and better than the preferences of *many philosophers*;
3. The Peripatetics thought the preferences of *many philosophers* were better indicators of the good than the Epicureans thought.¹¹

In each case, the stance the school takes makes sense relative to its answer to the Central Question. The Stoics, for example, prioritised identifying those things we believed to be good, which weren't good at all. And the Epicureans thought that there was special reason to focus on the desires of infants: they were desires that we inevitably had, and that we could treat the desires of the philosophers with considerably more caution. Aristotle was far more confident that experience, reflection and good intentions tended to increase people's understanding of things, and so would have put far more weight on the philosophers' preferences than that of infants; because he did not share Epicurus' framework for studying desires, he did not have Epicurus' reason for elevating the preferences of infants. Sextus here is therefore taking advantage of the fact that there's no agreed upon criterion: each of these arguments is a good argument according to the standards that the particular school is

¹¹ See *Topics III.116a12–18*. An alternative reading would be to classify this as an extension of the argument Sextus makes at *PH III.179–82*, that we would expect a good thing to affect everyone similarly. But the contrast between infants and philosophers gives the argument an extra point, which would be lost if we read it that way.

applying. While we can choose to side with one school or another, there's no neutral perspective to be taken where we simply assess the arguments.¹²

It is worth pointing out that the Peripatetics would most likely see this as a misapplication of their test. For Sextus is appealing not to the behaviour of philosophers, but to their words, and the Peripatetic test involves looking at what people actually choose, not what they say they would choose. They would also see it as important to consider whether other goods were in play. Philosophers might choose exertion over pleasure because they want wisdom, and think wisdom is better than pleasure, but their choices when wisdom is not available might still reveal that they prefer pleasure over many other things. But the Peripatetics may well have wanted to use such behaviour to show that wisdom was better than pleasure, and the Epicureans would have been unmoved by such an argument, so Sextus' illustration of the problem is effective, even if imperfect.

What should we do when faced with such a disagreement? If it were possible, we would move to a higher level to resolve the disagreement. But our hopes of doing this here are slim: understandings of the argumentative context and goals of argument in studying the good involve relatively basic epistemic presuppositions. One could try to resolve the epistemological disagreements, of course, but similar problems are likely to recur. The disagreement about motivations for studying the goodness of things seems difficult to resolve without already knowing what the goodness of things are, or at least some idea of the point of the investigation into them, which becomes circular.

¹² This is not to say that the problem of the criterion is just the problem that people had different understandings of the argumentative context. Rather, the different understandings of the argumentative context provide an illustration of the problem of the criterion.

It may seem that we have wound up in a position where we have no reason to prefer one position over another, and so we can apply something that decision theorists call the principle of indifference, or POI. It's this principle that allows us to assign probabilities of .5 to a coin coming up heads and tails, and of 1/6 to rolling a 4 on a six sided die. One of my favourite statements of the principle puts it in terms of having a belief state that leans one way or another. If one does not have any evidence for one proposition over another, then, the principle states, one ought not to have any belief state that leans towards one or another. On this statement, the principle carefully stays neutral between assigning equal degrees of belief to each of the alternatives (a controversial possibility), suspending judgement, and other ways of treating the possibilities equally. It's a refreshingly indifferent statement of the indifference principle.¹³

One could argue that, when we properly appreciate that we don't have an agreed upon standard, we are effectively in a state of having no evidence. For we have no method for evaluating the relative strength of competing considerations, and so have no reason to think they'll come out one way rather than another. If this is correct, then the preconditions for applying the indifference principle would hold. Assuming that the indifference principle is true, Sextus seems on good ground.

It's a mistake to go directly from the claim that we lack a shared standard to the claim that we are in a state of having no evidence. For there is at least one clear case where lacking shared

¹³ This is how Greg Novack defines it in "A Defence of the Principle of Indifference". For a good discussion of the principle of indifference, and a major objection to it, see Martin Smith's "Evidential Incomparability and the Principle of Indifference": 605-616.

standards is unproblematic, and that is the case in which different standards for evidence arise from different goals in an investigation. Consider the difference between a researcher in education and a teacher assessing the effectiveness of teaching materials. A researcher in education ought to suspend judgement about the effectiveness of teaching materials until they have been appropriately tested, using adequate and statistically robust measures, and in a context in which possible confounding variables can be controlled for. At present, this means suspending belief about the efficacy of most teaching practices. A teacher planning a class cannot suspend judgement to the same extent, since they must come up with a plan of how to present material, and it is presently impossible to base such a plan entirely on pedagogical science. Teachers therefore use their own judgement as a standard of truth, and their judgement, being informed by experience, is enough to enable most of them to make reasonable evaluations of the evidence.¹⁴ Here, the goals are different: education researchers are trying to provide an authoritative understanding of teaching and learning, while teachers are trying to understand concrete situations well enough to convey knowledge to students.

Similarly, in studying the good, the difference in standards is, as I have been arguing, in large part explained by a difference in research goals. Peripatetics want to locate the highest good, and are not very worried about wrongly believing that some things are lesser good, when they're in fact neutral or even bad. Stoics are particularly worried, for various reasons, about pursuing things that are only apparently, but not actually, good. Epicureans feel bound up by social norms, and value intellectual independence, and so they focus on sources of evidence that will allow them to achieve this epistemic goal. We cannot achieve all these epistemic

¹⁴ By 'using their own judgement' I mean they reflect on and consider the advantages and disadvantages of possible ways of teaching a course, and come up with what seems best to them after careful reflection. This is as opposed to following the guidance of scientific evidence.

goals at once, and which of them one has at the outset will provide one's standard. It's not clear that it's unreasonable to choose to pursue such an epistemic goal.

The teacher and the researcher can, in principle, reconcile the differences in what they accept about educational methods. The teacher can accept that the researcher is playing a different role, and vice versa, and they can reach some agreement about the reliability of the teacher's judgement in comparison with the reliability of the researcher's judgement, and how this means that they are each carrying out their role correctly. They could, for example, adopt a form of contextualism, agreeing that it's fine to assert that class discussion is important for developing critical thinking skills in a discussion among teachers of philosophy, but among educational researchers we should simply say that no studies have been conducted.

Such a contextualist answer is not available in the case in the debate between the ancient schools about the good, because the contexts in which the results of the inquiry are to be applied are too similar: namely, deciding the principles by which one will lead one's life. The pre-theoretical assumptions about, e.g, the relative importance of finding fakes or avoiding emotional discomfort are clearly in competition with each other, in a way that the role of teacher and the role of researcher are not. Nevertheless, one could in principle come to an overall agreement about who was more likely to make which sorts of errors, and what the costs were in terms of fundamental values. Whether in practice very many people would manage to do that without undermining their commitment to their values is another question.

When we consider this, it becomes clear that moving from disagreement to suspension is not straightforward. Why should it be wrong to start an investigation for arbitrarily chosen

reasons? If Sextus responds, as he suggested earlier, by taking a different set of presuppositions, the others are free to respond: that's just not what interests me here; or, that doesn't seem to me to be the most important problem. Sextus can, of course, respond in the same way, but it's not clear why his doing this should lead anyone to abandon their position. In fact, it seems that he ought to say what it is that interests him, since it doesn't seem to be any of the things that the others we have considered so far are interested in.

Sextus does have a particular reason: his aim in studying the good is to achieve freedom from a particular kind of trouble, and against this background suspension of belief is a reasonable reaction to disagreement.¹⁵ But Sextus' motivations have been poorly understood and are often taken to be deeply problematic against the background of his scepticism. If this was true, Skepticism would not stand as one of the intellectually respectable responses to the debate. In the next two sections, I will consider why Sextus' response has been taken to be problematic, and offer a defence along lines that I take to be new ones.

Section Three: A Limited Peacefulness

In this section, I will discuss Sextus' claim that the goal is peace of mind in matters of belief, and moderate feeling in necessary matters. This claim constitutes an essential part of Sextus' understanding of the argumentative context: it is what we hope to get out of philosophical reflection on the goodness of things. But on the usual way of reading this claim, it comes into tension with his skeptical outlook. For Sextus claims repeatedly that the Skeptic doesn't adhere to any strange or surprising positions: but it seems strange and surprising both that

¹⁵ It is this necessity of *ataraxia* in underwriting the rationality of suspension of belief that D. E. Machuca misses in his excellent "The Pyrrhonist's ἀταραξία and φιλανθρωπία".

peace of mind would be the goal of life, and that suspension of belief would be enough to achieve it. I argue in this section that these problems arise because of a misunderstanding about what Sextus means by the goal: instead of taking ‘the goal of Skepticism’ to mean what Skeptics pursue in life in general, we should take it to mean ‘what Skeptics hope to achieve through Skeptical practice’. This allows us to take a minimal reading of what Sextus means by peace of mind in matters of belief which is compatible with following conventionally accepted norms about, for example, grieving.

Sextus discusses the Skeptics’ position on the goal in the following passage:

Following these things, it will be good to discuss the goal of the sceptical school. Well, the goal is that for the sake of which everything is done or considered, and which is for the sake of nothing, or the most final of desires. Now we say at the beginning that the Skeptic's goal is peace of mind in things related to belief and moderate feeling in necessary affairs. For at the beginning they philosophised by discerning appearances and taking up, that some things were true, and others false, in order to gain peace of mind, when they fell upon an equally-weighted dispute, and being unable to decide it, suspended judgement; peace of mind in the case of belief followed closely, as it happened, to the person who had suspended judgement. [...] For this reason we say that the sceptic's goal is peace of mind in matters of belief, and moderate feeling in necessary matters. Some of the famous

sceptics add to these things also suspension of belief in investigation.¹⁶ (*PH*

I.25-30)

Commentators have taken this passage to reflect the Sceptics' adherence to a particular way of life characterised by indifference. Myles Burnyeat argued that it involved a deep and unliveable level of detachment, going through life without caring any more about whether you lived or died than whether the number of stars was even or odd, creating intense alienation.¹⁷ Martha Nussbaum argues for a less extreme reading, according to which the Sceptics' disengagement is more moderate, but on her reading it still involves a life entirely without emotion.¹⁸ They take the Sceptic's peace of mind to be an overarching phenomenon: freedom from all suffering except hunger, thirst, cold. Burnyeat states that peace of mind is "the sceptic spelling of happiness".¹⁹

There is a tension between this and the Sceptic's suspension of belief. It's not that the Sceptic must have a strong commitment to the claim that this is a good way to live; the Sceptic lives by appearances, and this could just be one appearance among many. It's that it involves taking a position on happiness that is not at all obvious, and unlikely to be widely shared. Few people, I think, would opt for a completely emotionless and detached life; it would seem

¹⁶ Τούτοις ἀκόλουθον ἂν εἴη καὶ περὶ τοῦ τέλους τῆς σκεπτικῆς ἀγωγῆς διεξελεῖν. ἔστι μὲν οὖν τέλος τὸ οὗ χάριν πάντα πράττεται ἢ θεωρεῖται, αὐτὸ δὲ οὐδενὸς ἕνεκα, ἢ τὸ ἔσχατον τῶν ὀρεκτῶν. φαμὲν δὲ ἄχρι νῦν τέλος εἶναι τοῦ σκεπτικοῦ τὴν ἐν τοῖς κατὰ δόξαν ἀταραξίαν καὶ ἐν τοῖς κατηναγκασμένοις μετριοπάθειαν. ἀρξάμενος γὰρ φιλοσοφεῖν ὑπὲρ τοῦ τὰς φαντασίας ἐπικρῖναι καὶ καταλαβεῖν, τίνες μὲν εἰσιν ἀληθεῖς τίνες δὲ ψευδεῖς, ὥστε ἀταρακτῆσαι, ἐνέπεσεν εἰς τὴν ἰσοσθενῇ διαφωνίαν, ἣν ἐπικρῖναι μὴ δυνάμενος ἐπέσχετο· ἐπισχόντι δὲ αὐτῷ τυχικῶς παρηκολούθησεν ἢ ἐν τοῖς δοξαστοῖς ἀταραξία. [...] διὰ τοῦτο οὖν ἐν μὲν τοῖς δοξαστοῖς ἀταραξίαν τέλος εἶναί φαμεν τοῦ σκεπτικοῦ, ἐν δὲ τοῖς κατηναγκασμένοις μετριοπάθειαν. Τινὲς δὲ τῶν δοκίμων σκεπτικῶν προσέθηκαν τούτοις καὶ τὴν ἐν ταῖς ζητήσεσιν ἐποχήν.

¹⁷ *Can the Sceptic Live his Scepticism*: 40.

¹⁸ *The Therapy of Desire*: 313.

¹⁹ *Can the Sceptic Live his Scepticism*: 25.

to most to be a strange ideal. Further, the claim that this can be achieved simply by working through philosophical arguments on each side of an issue and suspending belief seems like a bold causal claim that people are unlikely to be convinced of without proof.

Other philosophical schools at the time, of course, proposed good lives with various degrees of detachment. Epicurean philosophy was designed to break down many attachments, although importantly not the value placed on close human relationships. Stoicism similarly adopted a relatively detached ideal. Proponents of these schools, however, argued extensively for these positions. Such argument was not available to the Skeptics.

Consider the analogy Sextus draws with the methodist doctor and the Skeptic:

Just as in accordance with the necessary afflictions, the Skeptic is led by thirst to drink, by hunger to food and in other cases similarly so also the methodist doctor is lead by the afflictions to the appropriate things: by stoppage of the pores to loosening, as someone fleeing from condensation due to intense cold seeks refuge in warmth, from flowing by checking them, just as also those in the bath who are dripping with much sweat and relaxed come to close them and because of this take refuge in the cold air. And it is clear that the things foreign in nature force us to go to remove them, from the fact that a dog with a thorn stuck in it will remove it.²⁰ (PH I.238)

²⁰ ὥσπερ οὖν κατὰ τὴν ἀνάγκην τῶν παθῶν ὁ σκεπτικὸς ὑπὸ μὲν δίψους ἐπὶ ποτὸν ὁδηγεῖται, ὑπὸ δὲ λιμοῦ ἐπὶ τροφήν, καὶ ἐπὶ τι τῶν ἄλλων ὁμοίως, οὕτω καὶ ὁ μεθοδικὸς ἰατρὸς ὑπὸ τῶν παθῶν ἐπὶ τὰ κατάλληλα ὁδηγεῖται, ὑπὸ μὲν στεγνώσεως ἐπὶ τὴν χαύνωσιν, ὡς καταφεύγει τις ἀπὸ τῆς διὰ ψυχὸς ἐπιτεταμένον πυκνώσεως ἐπὶ ἀλέαν, ὑπὸ δὲ ῥύσεως ἐπὶ τὴν ἐποχὴν αὐτῆς, ὡς καὶ οἱ ἐν βαλανείῳ ἰδρωῖσι πολλῶν περιρρεόμενοι καὶ ἐκλυόμενοι ἐπὶ τὴν ἐποχὴν αὐτοῦ παραγίνονται καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐπὶ τὸν ψυχρὸν ἀέρα καταφεύγουσιν. ὅτι δὲ καὶ τὰ φύσει ἀλλότρια ἐπὶ τὴν ἄρσιν αὐτῶν ἵεναι καταναγκάζει, πρόδηλον, ὅπου γε καὶ ὁ κύων σκόλοπος αὐτῷ καταπαγέντος ἐπὶ τὴν ἄρσιν αὐτοῦ παραγίνεται

Here, Sextus describes how Skeptics are guided by natural impulses to their natural cure: by thirst to drink, for example, just as a dog is guided, naturally, to remove a thorn from a foot. The methodist doctor is, according to Sextus, guided in a similar way with physical conditions such as the stoppage of pores. It is hard to reconcile this picture of how the Skeptic lives with the picture of Skeptical practice mentioned above. For on this picture, the Skeptic comes to someone who thinks there's nothing wrong with them, and makes bizarre claims about the desirability of their grief at their mothers' death and their joy on a summer's morning, and about the causes of each of these. Unlike the dog's thorn, the 'therapy' suggested does not address an obvious problem, and the step from the problem to the cure is nothing like so obvious as removing a thorn. An unlikely solution to an apparently non-existent problem must have been a hard sell.

The tension becomes even more difficult to handle when we consider how a Skeptic is actually supposed to make decisions. Their *telos* apparently plays no role:

Now, as we devote ourselves to the appearances, we live without belief in accordance with the observations of life, since we cannot be completely motionless. These observations of daily life seem to be four: one lies in the guidance of nature, one in the necessary feelings, one in our inherited laws and customs, one in the teaching of the arts. In the case of the guidance of nature, we act naturally in accordance with perception and intellection, it is in accordance with the necessary feelings that hunger leads us to food, and thirst to drink; in accordance with the inherited laws and our upbringing that

we accept in life piety to be good and impiety to be bad; in accordance with the teachings of the arts we will not be inactive in those arts which we accept. We say all these things without conviction.²¹ (*PH I.23–24*)

In this passage, Sextus explains how the Skeptics make their day-to-day decisions. Importantly, they do not do so by choosing those things that seem to bring about the greatest peace of mind. Instead, they rely on natural guidance, inherited customs and laws, the teachings of the arts, and the necessary feelings. The kind of life they live is one in which guidance by philosophical systems plays effectively no role. They follow the precepts of piety, for example, simply because this is what our upbringing and inherited law dictates. Presumably they also follow inherited customs about grieving, seeking revenge, and so on.

This is, of course, reconcilable with the idea that peace of mind is the overarching goal of a Sceptic's life. It is possible to have a distinction between the grounds on which one makes one's day-to-day decisions, and the *telos* of a life. We see this often in games: the goal of the game might be to have fun, but we do not make each decision in the game by calculating what will give us the most fun. Instead, we try to calculate what will make us the most likely to win, for we would have the most fun this way. In this case, strategic considerations in the game would be our *criterion*, while *fun* would be our *telos*. Sextus might have a view like this: peace of mind is the *telos*, but the best way we achieve this is not by pursuing it directly,

²¹ τοῖς φαινομένοις οὖν προσέχοντες κατὰ τὴν βιωτικὴν τήρησιν ἀδοξάστως βιοῦμεν, ἐπεὶ μὴ δυνάμεθα ἀνενέργητοι παντάπασιν εἶναι. ἔοικε δὲ αὕτη ἡ βιωτικὴ τήρησις τετραμερὴς εἶναι καὶ τὸ μὲν τι ἔχειν ἐν ὑψηλήσῃ φύσεως, τὸ δὲ ἐν ἀνάγκῃ παθῶν, τὸ δὲ ἐν παραδόσει νόμων τε καὶ ἔθων, τὸ δὲ ἐν διδασκαλίᾳ τεχνῶν, ὑψηλήσῃ μὲν φυσικῇ καθ' ἣν φυσικῶς αἰσθητικοὶ καὶ νοητικοὶ ἔσμεν, παθῶν δὲ ἀνάγκῃ καθ' ἣν λιμὸς μὲν ἐπὶ τροφὴν ἡμᾶς ὁδηγεῖ, δίψος δ' ἐπὶ πόμα, ἔθων δὲ καὶ νόμων παραδόσει καθ' ἣν τὸ μὲν εὐσεβεῖν παραλαμβάνομεν βιωτικῶς ὡς ἀγαθὸν τὸ δὲ ἀσεβεῖν ὡς φαῦλον, λαμβάνομεν βιωτικῶς ὡς ἀγαθὸν τὸ δὲ ἀσεβεῖν ὡς φαῦλον, τεχνῶν δὲ διδασκαλίᾳ καθ' ἣν οὐκ ἀνενέργητοί ἐσμεν ἐν αἷς παραλαμβάνομεν τέχναις. ταῦτα δὲ πάντα φαμὲν ἀδοξάστως.

but by uncritically conforming ourselves to the observations of life. The Stoics made a similar point in explaining how people can aim at securing “the primary objects of nature” (*prima naturae*), while the goal is actually merely to act in accordance with nature. Cicero’s Cato uses the example of an archer who must aim at a target, but who is satisfied if he has shot well – actually hitting the target lies out of his control. (*De Fin.* 20–22) In each of these cases, the *telos* provides the justification for what is aimed at. We play to win, *because* this is the best way to have fun. The archer aims at the target, *because* this is to shoot well. The suggestion here would be that Sextus had in mind that we follow the observances in life *because* this is the best way to get peace of mind.

There is very good reason to doubt that Sextus thought the *criterion* and the *telos* stood in such a relation. Different laws and customs no doubt support peace of mind to greater and lesser degrees. At the very least, the *telos* of peace of mind would provide a standard by which laws and customs could be evaluated, and it’s by no means obvious that they will do very well according to this standard. Yet Sextus doesn’t suggest any such evaluation at all. And if you suppose that any practice at all would lead to just as much peace of mind, provided you suspend belief, then why don’t the Skeptics choose their criterion of action arbitrarily? Finally, the fact that the Skeptics follow conventional ideas about what is good is a serious problem, since following these conventional ideas is likely to lead you to think that there’s more to life than wandering around in a state of detachment. In short, reading the Skeptics as claiming that the *telos* of life was peace of mind, and understanding peace of mind as an extreme state of detachment, is at odds with the Skeptics’ claims about how they actually made decisions and lived.

Commentators, with the exception of Gisela Striker, have missed an ambiguity in Sextus' claim that peace of mind is the goal of the Skeptical school.²² The term I'm translating with 'school' is *agōgē*. This is frequently translated as *way of life*, or even *lifestyle* in this context, and that is certainly something that *agōgē* can mean. But the term can also mean *training*, or simply *philosophical school*.²³ Because of this, it is unclear just from this passage whether Sextus is talking about the goal that Skeptics have throughout life, or the goal that the Skeptics had from their skeptical practice.

Now, there is some precedent in for taking peace of mind to be the goal of life, for the Epicureans did this; the Stoics claimed, also, that the sage would enjoy a state of peace of mind, though this is a consequence of the highest good, rather than a constituent part.²⁴ However, there is also a precedent according to which some kind of disturbance is the initial motivation for philosophy. We find this in Plato's *Theaetetus*:

For if you act in this way, the people arguing with you will blame themselves for their trouble (*tarakhē*) and confusion (*aporia*), and they will follow you and love you, and hate themselves and flee from themselves into philosophy.²⁵ (*Theaetetus* 168a2–4)

²² *Ataraxia as Happiness*: 105, but cf. 106, where Striker concludes that the Skeptics are talking about the goal of *life*. I argue that they are talking about the goal of *skepticism*.

²³ LSJ II.3; II.8

²⁴ Striker discusses both of these views in *Ataraxia as Happiness*: 99–101. See Epicurus *Ad Men.* 128; Seneca, *De Vita Beata*, 15.2.

²⁵ ἂν μὲν γὰρ οὕτω ποιῇς, ἑαυτοὺς αἰτιάσονται οἱ προσδιατρίβοντές σοι τῆς αὐτῶν ταραχῆς καὶ ἀπορίας ἀλλ' οὐ σέ, καὶ σέ μὲν διώξονται καὶ φιλήσουσιν, αὐτοὺς δὲ μισήσουσι καὶ φεύξονται ἀφ' ἑαυτῶν εἰς φιλοσοφίαν

Socrates is not saying here that the *goal* of philosophy is peace of mind. But he *is* saying that this is one of the initial psychological motivations for studying philosophy. We get a similar motivational point in Aristotle:

And being confused and wondering they realised that they did not know
(and for this reason a lover of stories (*philomuthos*) is, in a way, a
philosopher: for a story (*muthos*) is composed from the objects of wonder):
thus since they started philosophical reflection in order to flee ignorance, it
is obvious that they pursued knowledge in order to know, and not for the
sake of some use.²⁶ (*Met.* 982b10)

This passage also describes emotional motivations for the beginning of philosophy. These are ‘wonder’ and ‘being confused’. We saw ‘being confused’ closely connected with trouble in the *Theaetetus*, so this passage almost certainly picks up the same idea. In this passage, Aristotle gives the goal of philosophy: knowledge for its own sake, but the initial motivation is a kind of psychological disturbance.

In the passage on the goal, Sextus draws a parallel between the painter Apelles and the Sceptics. The story about Apelles is that he was trying to paint the foam on a horse’s mouth, and couldn’t get it right; eventually, he threw the sponge he used to clean the paint from his

²⁶ ὁ δ’ ἀπορῶν καὶ θαυμάζων οἶεται ἀγνοεῖν (διὸ καὶ ὁ φιλόμυθος φιλόσοφος πῶς ἐστίν· ὁ γὰρ μῦθος σύγκειται ἐκ θαυμασίων)· ὥστ’ εἴπερ διὰ τὸ φεύγειν τὴν ἄγνοιαν ἐφιλοσόφησαν, φανερόν ὅτι διὰ τὸ εἰδέναι τὸ ἐπίστασθαι ἐδίωκον καὶ οὐ χρήσεώς τινος ἔνεκεν.

brushes against the picture in frustration, and paint fell from the sponge in just the right way to portray foam.²⁷ Similarly for the Sceptics:

The Sceptics desired to obtain peace of mind by deciding the inconsistency between appearances and reason, were unable to do this and suspended belief. But when they stopped, peace of mind happened to follow them just as a shadow follows a body.²⁸ (*PH I.29*)

Here, the psychological motivation is taken, from the beginning, to be the guiding one. But the trouble that would be resolved by resolving the inconsistency between appearances and reason is one that would be well described by the term ‘confusion’ (*aporia*) or ‘wonder’, as in Plato and Aristotle. The Sceptics, contrary to what Aristotle says about people in general, were not merely pursuing knowledge for its own sake; they wanted, in addition, freedom from trouble.

For all that Aristotle says, knowledge could be just one good among many; similarly, for all the Sceptics say here, peace of mind could be just one good among many, and this is how I think it’s best to take them. Just as for Aristotle, knowledge is the goal of philosophy, for the Sceptics, peace of mind is the goal of Sceptical practice. Seeing the discussion about the goal in these terms also helps us to understand why other Sceptics claimed that the goal was

²⁷ Apelles is the subject of at least one other story about horses of epistemological interest: in some kind of horse-painting contest, because he was worried about his rivals having influenced the judges, he brought some horses along. The paintings were presented to the horses one by one, but it was only when they saw Apelles’ painting that the horses began to neigh. (Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, XXXV.36.)

²⁸ καὶ οἱ σκεπτικοὶ οὖν ἤλπιζον μὲν τὴν ἀταραξίαν ἀναλήψεσθαι διὰ τοῦ τὴν ἀνωμαλίαν τῶν φαινομένων τε καὶ νοουμένων ἐπικρίναι, μὴ δυνηθέντες δὲ ποιῆσαι τοῦτο ἐπέσχον· ἐπισχοῦσι δὲ αὐτοῖς οἷον τυχικῶς ἡ ἀταραξία παρηκολούθησεν ὥς σκιδά σώματι.

simply suspension of belief. Once you say that you doubt that anyone will ever gain knowledge, people can reasonably ask what the point of philosophical reflection is. You might still think there's some value in suspending belief, rather than believing in things that you actually don't know.

Freedom from the kind of psychological bother that arises from philosophical problems is a very limited kind of peace of mind, but note that achieving it by suspending belief matches well enough with the description of removing a thorn from a dog's foot we saw above. The thought is something like: holding beliefs about things can cause discomfort. If you can somehow get rid of the belief, you get rid of the discomfort.

The Sceptics thought there was an extra set of troubles that came from beliefs about the goodness of things. When we believe that something is good or bad, this belief causes us to suffer. In the case of something we believe to be good, we suffer when we have it, for we fear losing it; and we suffer when we don't have it, for we wish to have it all the more. The Sceptics didn't see this as the only possible cause of suffering, and they stop short of offering people complete freedom from trouble. Instead, they saw it as an additional, and unnecessary cause of suffering, one that you are always better off without. It is these claims, in conjunction with the biography of Pyrrho, that have led people into readings according to which the Skeptic lives a strikingly detached life.

It is unsurprisingly difficult to extract, from Sextus, an exact account of how much of life's suffering is caused by beliefs about the goodness of things. He asserts in one place that it is all suffering, but clearly contradicts this elsewhere, and this doesn't seem to reflect how

things actually appeared to Sextus; rather, he seems to be using a Stoic premise in arguing against them. He does make a list of necessary feelings, but this list seems unlikely to be exhaustive. Perhaps he didn't, himself, think he could say with any precision how much help Skepticism would be to any particular person. In this case, I think that it is fair to decide the matter in a way that allows Sextus to maintain his self-presentation as offering a reasonably obvious solution to a reasonably obvious problem. In this case, we should think that the feelings people have and value the most throughout their lives, such as love and grief, remain to the Skeptic. What is gone are feelings caused by higher-order thoughts and judgements about the events surrounding such things. That is, we should read Sextus as saying that thinking or judging the quality of any situation causes pointless suffering.

Certainly, the Skeptics think that this has a moderating effect on what one feels: they describe the goal of Skepticism as achieving moderate feeling (*metropatheia*). But they shouldn't be taken, by this, to mean that one never feels intense emotions; rather, that their emotions are generally less intense than those of people who have fixed beliefs about the goodness of things. A Skeptic may feel intense grief when someone close to them dies; but this grief will be *less intense* than that of someone who believes, firmly, that they have lost something good. How much of a difference there is in the intensity of the emotion will vary from case to case, no doubt. But whatever the intensity happens to be, the Skeptics are on fairly strong grounds. For they can argue that the only loss of intensity is that which comes from suspending beliefs that one is holding dogmatically, and add that such suffering appears pointless to them.

At this point, the distinction we made earlier between whether the Skeptics are talking about a goal of life, or a goal of Skeptical practice, becomes very important. If the Skeptics were

talking about a goal of life, then the goal they are suggesting would seem fairly disappointing: aiming to take the edge off suffering, and to resolve the suffering that arises with philosophical problems, is a very modest goal, and it would seem very strange if that was really all they wanted out of life. As the goal for their philosophical practice, however, the goal seems like a perfectly reasonable one; the Skeptics claim that following the other philosophical schools will lead to more persistent worries, because of dogmatizing about the goodness of things, and because of accepting positions against which there are arguments that cannot be finally refuted. And for them, this doesn't seem worth the worry.

Reading the Skeptics in this way allows us to see how their methods and philosophical approach fits well with their understanding of the goals of philosophical argument: they want to get rid of the discomfort that arises from philosophical problems, and to avoid, where possible, the suffering that comes from holding beliefs about the goodness and badness of things. These are things one might pursue, quite reasonably, with a fairly conventional outlook on life; people don't want to suffer, when the suffering is avoidable and pointless; the tension that exists between holding, on the one hand, that one should pursue above all a detachment that many would find strange and offputting, and the claim that one is following a conventional lifestyle in line with basic drives, doesn't occur if we read the Skeptics in this way. Now, other schools can still object. The Epicureans can argue, for example, that the Skeptics would only be taking a small risk of committing themselves too hastily by signing up to their cautious, observation-based methodology, and that the rewards would be considerable. And Seneca can argue that the Skeptics, by following convention, risk the integrity of their lives and the way they spend their time by pursuing things that are merely apparently good. These are positions on the initial motivations for investigation that will set

the standards for the investigation, and they are reasonable motivations to have in investigating the goodness of things. Suspension of belief is only the right response to the situation from the viewpoint of someone who has some reason to withhold belief entirely, rather than run the risk of error; Sextus provides such a reason.

Section Four: Just Therapy?

Given that Skeptical inquiry has the goal of achieving peace of mind and moderate feeling, we might doubt that it is anything more than a course of therapy. Given that their goals are emotional ones, it might seem that they should have been willing to intentionally argue in intellectually dishonest ways, or to adopt methods of investigation that would obviously be counter-productive to an exercise of finding the truth. Let's call the view on which the Skeptics were only interested in arguments for their therapeutic value the *Therapy at Any Cost* position.²⁹ Against this view, I will argue for the *Intellectually Honest Therapy* view: according to this view, the Skeptics were only willing to suspend belief as the result of an intellectually honest consideration of the arguments on either side of a position. While they suspended belief about whether their procedure was more reasonable than their opponents', it seemed to them the best one at hand.

This is important for us to consider now for three reasons. First, because if the Skeptics adopted the *Therapy at Any Cost* position, their investigation into the goodness of things ceases to look like an investigation at all, but rather a kind of dogmatic brainwashing. We would have good reason to think that they were a less philosophically interesting school than

²⁹ Nussbaum is clearly committed to the *Therapy at Any Cost* position in the *Therapies of Desire*: 306–308.

their rivals, if they were into brainwashing. Second, it's important for understanding certain features of Skeptical practice: why did they try to consider arguments on either side of a question so widely? Why did they talk to dogmatists, rather than avoiding them? Why do we find, in fact, no strategies for achieving peace of mind except for opposing arguments? Third, even after resolving the tensions in the previous section, we might worry that the Skeptics are unconventional in their attitude to reasoning, or at least that there is a tension between Skeptical practice and the initial motivations for the Skeptics: the willingness to actively manipulate what one believes is at odds with conventional norms, and even more so with the values of people who were troubled by philosophical problems. Such a tension would be problematic for Skepticism.

The best evidence for the Therapy at any Cost position lies in this passage in the *PH*:

Because of being philanthropic, the Sceptic likes to cure the conceit and rashness of the dogmatists using argument where possible. Just as doctors of bodily sufferings have remedies that differ in size, and apply the strong ones to those suffering strongly, and the lighter ones to those suffering more lightly, so the Sceptic gives arguments differing in strength, and uses those ones which are weighty, and which can dismantle vigorously and heavily the affliction of the dogmatists' self-conceit in the case in which a strong conceit is set down. He makes use of lighter arguments in cases which are superficial and easy to cure, and where the affliction of belief can be destroyed by a lighter dose of persuasion.³⁰ (*PH III.280–I*)

³⁰ Ὁ σκεπτικὸς διὰ τὸ φιλόανθρωπος εἶναι τὴν τῶν δογματικῶν οἷησίν τε καὶ προπέτειαν κατὰ δύναμιν ἱᾶσθαι λόγῳ βούλεται. καθάπερ οὖν οἱ τῶν σωματικῶν παθῶν ἰατροὶ διάφορα κατὰ μέγεθος ἔχουσι

In this passage, Sextus outlines something that sounds rather manipulative: arguments differ in persuasive force, and the Sceptic selects, not the most persuasive argument, but rather an argument well matched to the dogmatists' level of persuasion. This sounds an awful lot like the Therapy at Any Cost view. There are two things to keep in mind here, however. The first is that Sextus is not describing the practice that Sceptics use to keep themselves free of belief, but rather how Sceptics argue with dogmatists. The Sceptics think that a full consideration of all the arguments they know about will lead to suspension of belief, and this advice is likely meant for dealing with interlocutors who will not conduct a full consideration of the arguments on either side. What is going on here is something of a patch-up job, to help the dogmatist respond to trouble; giving them a too persuasive argument might convert them to a different belief that will trouble them, and giving them an insufficiently persuasive argument will not help. The second is that the advice is not to use arguments that are more or less *good*, but arguments that are more or less *seductive*. Because of the problem of the criterion, the Sceptics don't think that they know which arguments capture the best reasons for believing one thing rather than another; for all they know, the less persuasive arguments are actually the better ones. While it is certainly intellectually dishonest to go around propounding *bad* arguments, the same doesn't apply to *unpersuasive* arguments. In fact, we Dogmatists often hold back from offering arguments we think people will find persuasive, on the grounds that we think the arguments are bad ones.

βοηθήματα, καὶ τοῖς μὲν σφοδρῶς πεπονθόσι τὰ σφοδρὰ τούτων προσάγουσι, τοῖς δὲ κούφως τὰ κουφότερα, καὶ ὁ σκεπτικὸς οὕτως διαφόρους ἐρωτᾷ κατὰ ἰσχὺν λόγους, καὶ τοῖς μὲν ἐμβριθέσι καὶ εὐτόνως ἀνασκευάζειν δυναμένοις τὸ τῆς οἰήσεως τῶν δογματικῶν πάθος ἐπὶ τῶν σφοδρᾷ τῇ προπετείᾳ κεκακωμένων χρήται, τοῖς δὲ κουφοτέροις ἐπὶ τῶν ἐπιπόλαιον καὶ εὐίατον ἐχόντων τὸ τῆς οἰήσεως πάθος καὶ ὑπὸ κουφοτέρων πιθανοτήτων ἀνασκευάζεσθαι δυναμένων.

The Sceptics certainly try to describe themselves in intellectually honest terms. In *MI*, Sextus discusses the motives the Sceptics have in criticizing studies.³¹ He starts by speculating about a range of intellectually dishonest motives that Epicurus may have had for undertaking the same exercise: perhaps the Epicureans wished to hide their lack of education; maybe they hated Plato or Aristotle; maybe the problem was Epicurus' hatred of Nausiphane.³² He then writes the following about the Pyrrhonists:

The Pyrrhonists, however, do not criticise studies because they do not lead to wisdom—for this argument is dogmatic—nor because they are uneducated; for being well cultivated and much experienced belongs to them more than other philosophers, and moreover, they are indifferent to their reputation among the many. And it is not for the sake of enmity towards some people (for such an evil is far from their great gentleness). But they experience some such thing in the case of studies as they experienced about wisdom in general. For just as in this case they *went with a yearning to obtain the truth*, when they met with an equal battle and inconsistency of things, they suspended belief, so in the case of studies, when they undertook to understand them, and sought the truth in them, they found equal difficulties, and *did not hide them*.³³ (*MI.6*)

³¹ 'Studies' translates *mathemata*: in this work he will criticize grammar, rhetoric, geometry, arithmetic, and music.

³² Sextus reports Epicurus calling Nausiphane a 'jellyfish', which is also attested in *DL X.7*. It may be particularly important to Sextus that Epicurus insulted Nausiphane, since Nausiphane is listed among the early Pyrrhonists. (*DL IX.69*) Epistemologically, however, Nausiphane probably sat closer to Epicurus: Epicurus is said to have adapted the Canon from his Tripod (*DL X.14*)

³³ οἱ δὲ ἀπὸ Πύρρωνος οὔτε διὰ τὸ μηδὲν συνεργεῖν αὐτὰ πρὸς σοφίαν, δογματικὸς γὰρ ὁ λόγος, οὔτε διὰ τὴν προσοῦσαν αὐτοῖς ἀπαιδευσίαν· σὺν γὰρ τῷ πεπαιδεῦσθαι καὶ πολυπειροτέρους παρὰ τοὺς ἄλλους ὑπάρχειν φιλοσόφους ἔτι καὶ ἀδιαφόρως ἔχουσι πρὸς τὴν παρὰ τοῖς πολλοῖς δόξαν· καὶ μὴν οὐδὲ δυσμενείας χάριν τῆς πρὸς τινὰς μακρὰν γὰρ αὐτῶν τῆς πραότητός ἐστιν ἢ τοιαύτη κακία· ἀλλὰ

In this text, Sextus portrays the Pyrrhonists as people who had earnestly embarked on a search for the truth in the case of wisdom quite generally, and in a search for understanding in the case of studies. The problem was that in trying to understand these things, or find the truth, they hit difficulties they were unable to overcome. The fact that Sextus states that they ‘did not hide’ the difficulties is a barb aimed at other philosophers: either these philosophers did not see the difficulties, or, worse, they concealed them. In this passage, Sextus puts forwards intellectual honesty as a value of the Sceptics.

By intellectually honest, I mean that the Sceptics see their position as a preliminary result from a serious ongoing search for the truth, and one that doesn’t presuppose the answer at the outset. It is a search that they think is hopeless, but that they think is worth undertaking anyway, because the process of searching brings about tranquility. It is worth mentioning a few things I do not mean to assert. First, I do not mean to assert that the Sceptics think they have offered ‘a reasonable evaluation of the evidence as it stands’. Because of the problem of the criterion, no such evaluation of the evidence is even possible. Rather, they are reporting how things appear to them to stand after a serious consideration of the arguments. Second, I do not mean to assert that the Sceptics believe that they gain some advantage over the dogmatists. Even if the Sceptics could claim to have conducted a more comprehensive review of all the arguments, Sextus would be the first to point out that a more comprehensive review is not necessarily better than a less comprehensive one; some arguments are deceptive, and one might have been deceived by a clever fallacy late in the review process.

τοιοῦτόν τι ἐπὶ τῶν μαθημάτων παθόντες ὅποιον ἐφ’ ὅλης ἔπαθον τῆς σοφίας. καθὰ γὰρ ἐπὶ ταύτην ἦλθον πόθῳ τοῦ τυχεῖν τῆς ἀληθείας, ἰσοσθενεῖ δὲ μάχῃ καὶ ἀνωμαλία τῶν πραγμάτων ὑπαντήσαντες ἐπέσχον, οὕτω καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν μαθημάτων ὁρμήσαντες ἐπὶ τὴν ἀνάληψιν αὐτῶν, ζητοῦντες καὶ τὸ ἐνταῦθα μαθεῖν ἀληθές, τὰς δὲ ἴσας εὐρόντες ἀπορίας, οὐκ ἀπεκρύψαντο.

Importantly, Scepticism is offered as a way of achieving what was originally aimed at. When Apelles throws in the sponge, he successfully depicts the foam on the painting of the horse. When the Sceptics throw in their dogmatism, they successfully achieve what they were aiming to achieve through dogmatic inquiry. On the reading I'm proposing here, Scepticism is a way both to achieve peace of mind, and maintain intellectual honesty, and so is a rather striking success. On the Therapy at Any Cost reading, Scepticism achieves peace of mind at the cost of intellectual honesty, and so is importantly a partial failure.

As an additional argument against the Therapy at Any Cost reading: the Sceptics are portrayed as the sort of people, who, before they became Sceptics, were searching for the truth. They would be the sort of people who would only want to suspend belief if this was where such a search seemed to lead. It's unlikely that they would have been happy if, from the outset, Sextus suggested that instead of searching for the truth, they should try to oppose arguments to each other in such a way as to produce suspension of belief. Perhaps the Sceptics lured in their adherents with the promise of intellectual honesty, only to provide them with arguments designed carefully to bring about suspension of belief, carefully skirting around any arguments that might upset the delicate balance. This would be a rather neat bait-and-switch, and it is one that I doubt Sextus committed.

The ancient Sceptics' instrumentalization of reason, therefore, is superficial. Peace of mind explains why it's still worth investigating, even though the truth is unobtainable; the Sceptical search is, nevertheless, to be understood primarily as a search for truth.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have shown how the standards ancient philosophers used in inquiry into the goodness of things depended on their understanding of the goals of argument and the argumentative context. Someone just starting out in philosophy, faced with a choice between the different schools, would already have a feeling that they fell short of grasping, without argument, the truth about the goodness of things, and some sense of why this was important. This would lead them to find the arguments of some ancient philosophers far more compelling than others. Faced with the different approaches to studying the goodness of things, they need only have suspended belief if they started out concerned about too readily believing in the goodness of things.

This story of how affiliation to an ancient school operates strikes a compromise between the position taken by Hadot and that taken by Cooper.³⁴ For the person choosing between ancient schools does so by exercising their reason as best they can, but given their own understanding of the need for philosophical reflection in inquiring the goodness of things. Once a direction has been chosen, the use of reason will continue to determine affiliation to particular doctrines, sides taken in debates within philosophical schools, and so on: even once a standard has been agreed on, there is room for disagreement about how that standard is most rightly applied, and for differences in life experience to lead to differences in opinion. Nevertheless, the understanding of the need for philosophical reflection is unlikely to have been something arrived at wholly by the use of reason: the affiliation to an ancient philosophical school was, to this extent, most probably a question of personal affinity.

³⁴ See *Introduction*

Appendix One

This table is an attempt to provide an exhaustive compilation of arguments in the *EN* with conclusions like “A is better than B”, “A is worse than B”, “A is good”, “A is not good”, “A is bad”, and the *topos* from *Topics III.1–4* it instantiates, if it instantiates one. In some cases when Aristotle states such claims, there is no obvious argument; I have omitted these, though it is possible that in doing so I have overlooked a small number of relevant arguments. I have not included arguments such as “A is happiness” or “A is not happiness”, since I take it these trade on facts about happiness, and we wouldn’t necessarily expect to find corresponding *topoi* in these cases.

Bekker Line	Argument	Topos	Bekker Line
<u>EN I</u>			
1094a18–23	Something which everything is done for the sake of will be the good	What is done for its own sake is better than what is done for the sake of something else	116a29–31
1094b9–11	The good of the city is better than the good of the individual, for it is more fine and and god-like		None
1095b25	Honour is not the good, since it can easily be taken away		None
1095b27–29	Honour is for the sake of knowing one’s virtue, not for its own sake	What is done for its own sake is better than what is done for the sake of something else	116a29–31
1096a6–8	Wealth not the good since sought for the sake of other things	What is done for its own sake is better than what is done for the sake of something else	116a29–31
1097a25–32	Happiness is the good, because complete	What is done for its own sake is better than what is done for the sake of something else	116a29–31
1097b13–15	Happiness is the good, because it is self-sufficient (that is, <i>on its own</i> it makes life good and lacking nothing)	Extension of: that which is useful on all occasions, see chapter 3 for discussion	
1097b5–a15	Exercise of virtue the (human) good because it is ‘in the human’s function’	No <i>topos</i> , but note that Aristotle argues for the strategy by induction.	None

1100b10–17	We were right to define virtuous activities as the good, since these are the most permanent	What is longer lasting is better than what is less so	116a11–12
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EN III

1116b30–33	Soldiers compelled by commanders not as good as citizen soldiers, since act because of fear, not because of shame		None
1117a30–35	Courage is rightly praised because it is harder to endure what is painful than abstain from what is pleasant	What is difficult is better than what is less so	117b29
1118a25–28	It is easier to become temperate than courageous, so intemperance is more reprehensible than cowardice	What is difficult is better than what is less so	117b29

EN IV

1120a14–16	Praise is directed at the one who gives, not the one who does not take, since it is easier not to take than to give.	What is difficult is better than what is less so	117b29
1121a19–22	The wasteful person is better than the stingy person, since wastefulness is easily cured by age and poverty		None
1121a26–28	The wasteful person is better than the stingy person, since the wasteful person benefits many people, while the stingy person benefits nobody, not even himself!	A is better than B if A and B are both producers, and A produces something better than B. Or maybe if A has better implications than B, A is better than B.	116b26–27 or 117a5–15
1123b26–28	The great-souled must be the best people, if they are worthy of the best things		
1128b27–35	Shame is not a virtue, because to feel appropriate shame means you did something bad	If A has better implications than B, A is better than B. (Consider prior and posterior implications)	117a5–15

EN V

1138a30-b5	Acting unjustly is worse than suffering injustice, since acting unjustly is with complete, or almost complete, vice	Version of “greater number of goods better” – note special case “without pain is better than with pain”, here “without vice is better than with vice”	117a15–25
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EN VI

114a20–23	Human beings are not the best beings in the cosmos, so political science and practical wisdom are not the best things	A is better than B if A and B are both producers, and A produces something better than B. (Aristotle says at 1144a that wisdom produces happiness as health does; arguably it also produces the happiness of something better than humans)	116b26–27
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EN VII

1146a31–32	A person who desires pleasure with conviction is better than an incontinent person, for the incontinent person can be cured by persuasion	Cf. 1121a19–22	None
1150a1–5	Brutishness not as bad as vice, though more to be feared, since it consists not in the corruption of the superior element, but in its absence. Thus brutishness is less destructive than vice.	If A has better implications than B, A is better than B. (Consider prior and posterior implications)	117a5–15
1150a26–30	Everyone thinks worse of someone who does something disgraceful when appetite is weak, and who strikes someone when they are not angry: therefore the intemperate person is worse than the incontinent.	A variation of: if everyone would choose A over B, then A is better than B	116a12–18
1150a30–37	Self-control is more choiceworthy than endurance, since endurance is in resisting, while self-control is in overcoming. Resistance and overcoming are different as not being beaten is from winning	A in C, B in D, C better than D, then A better than B A like C, B like D, C better than D, then A better than D	116b17 117b19–21

1152b13–14	Pleasure is a coming to be towards a natural state; no coming to be is in the same genus as its end; so pleasures are not good.	Report of an opponent's strategy, not clearly rejected or accepted	None
1152b14–15	The wise man flees pain, rather than pursuing pleasure	A variation of: if everyone would choose A over B, then A is better than B	116a12–18
1152b15–16	Pleasures are a hindrance to thought, so pleasures are not good	That which hinders a good is not good	118b33–36
1152b17–18	No skill of pleasure, but every good a product of a skill, so pleasures are not good	Strategy rejected later at 1153a23–26	None
1152b19–20	Children and animals pursue pleasures, so pleasures are not good	Strategy rejected later at 1153b27	None
1152b20–21	There are shameful pleasures, so some pleasures are not good	Strategy not clearly accepted or rejected, cf. 1173b25–30	None
1152b22–23	Pleasure not the chief good, since it is not an end, but a coming-to-be	What is done for its own sake is better than what is done for the sake of something else	116a29–31
1153b27	Animals and children pursue pleasure, therefore pleasure is a good	What all things pursue is good	116a12–18
1554a8–10	Pleasures are good because the contrary pains are bad	Note that as a general strategy 'the opposite of a bad thing is a good thing' is rejected at 1173a5–12, argument holds in this particular case.	None

EN VIII

1155a1–5	Friendship one of chief goods, because nobody would desire to live without pleasure, even if they had all the other goods	If everyone would choose A over B, then A is better than B	116a12–18
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1159a20–25	Being loved better than being honoured, since being honoured chosen for the sake of something else, being loved for its own sake.	What is done for its own sake is better than what is done for the sake of something else	116a29–31
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EN IX

1170a20–b10	Roughly: a good friend’s life is to a good person what their own life is to themselves, so it is good.	If A is good, and B is like A, then B is good	117b10–12
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EN X

1172b10–12	Pleasure is the good because all things, both irrational and rational, seek it.	If everyone would choose A over B, then A is better than B	116a12–18
1172b15–17	Pain is avoided by all, and its contrary is something chosen by all, therefore it is the good (Accepted in a qualified way)	Note that as a general strategy ‘the opposite of a bad thing is a good thing’ is rejected at 1173a5–12, argument holds in this particular case.	None
1172b17–18	Pleasure is chosen for its own sake, therefore it is the good	What is done for its own sake is better than what is done for the sake of something else	116a29–31
1172b19–20	Pleasure added to any other good makes something better, therefore it is the good. (Accepted in a qualified way)	Version of “greater number of goods better” – note special case about pleasure	117a15–25
1173a15	Good determinate; pleasure admits of degree, therefore pleasure not good	Argument strategy rejected in following lines	None
1173a29–33	Pleasure not the good because it’s a process, and processes are comings to be, and comings to be are for the sake of something else.	What is done for its own sake is better than what is done for the sake of something else	116a29–31
1173b31–a1	Friend and flatterer criticized for associating with us for different reasons – the flatterer aims to please us, the friend aims at our good		None

1174a1–5	Nobody would choose to live their whole life with the mind of a child, even if they had all the pleasures, or enjoy doing some disgraceful deed, therefore pleasure is not the good	If everyone would choose A over B, then A is better than B	116a12–18
1174a4–9	We would be concerned to have many things even if they brought no pleasure with them such as seeing, remembering, knowing, possessing the virtues	If everyone would choose A over B, then A is better than B (nb. As argument for ‘the good’ rejected	116a12–18
1176b30–7a1	We choose everything for the sake of something else, but serious work for the sake of amusement would be absurd	If everyone would choose A over B, then A is better than B (nb. As argument for ‘the good’ rejected	116a12–18
1177a2–10	Amusement is not the good because the good is the activity of the best part, and the best part is virtue, and this is serious		None
1177a7-8a10	See <i>Chapter Three</i>		

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